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BY ANDY GREENWALD



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATT JONES



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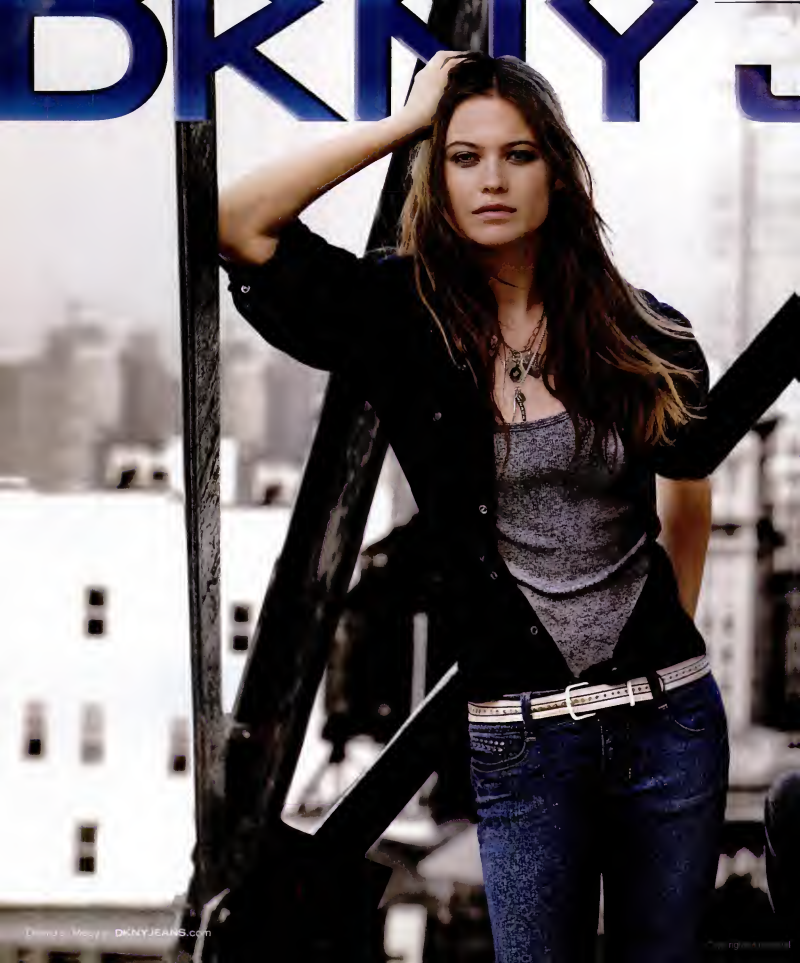
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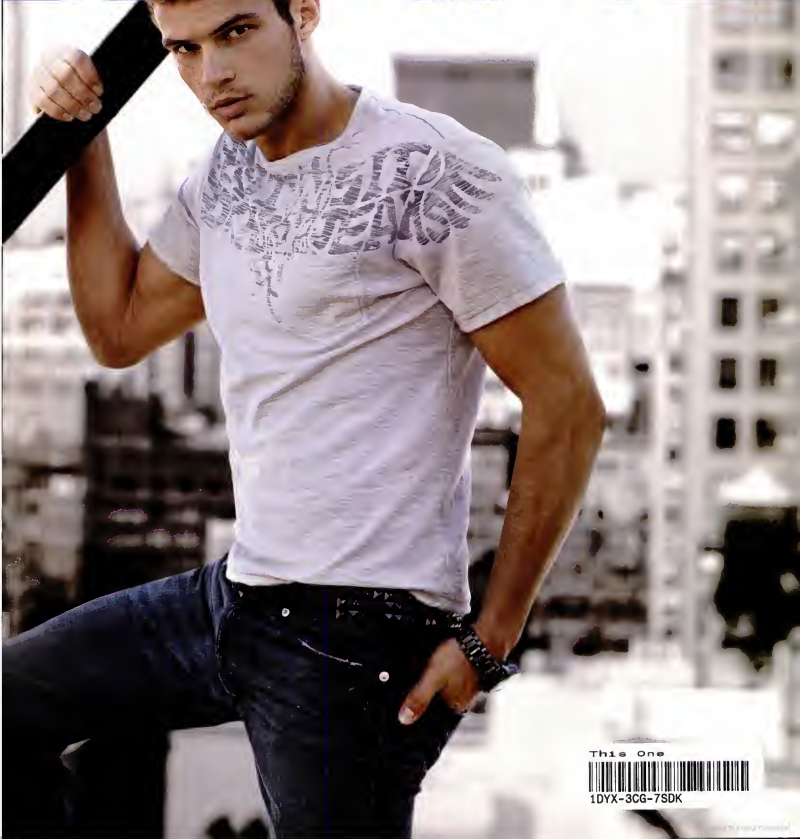
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ON THE COVER

Photographed exclusively for Spin by Matt Jones

Styling by Ting Ting Lin. Hair by Wesley O'Meara at the Well Group. From left, on Rostam Batmanglij: Steven Alan shirt, Marc Jacobs T-shirt, Buckler belt. On Ezra Koenig: J. Press shirt. On Chris Tomson: Penguin polo shirt, McArthur sweater, artist's own. On Chris Ballew: J. Press sweater, Penguin shirt.

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60 Vampire Weekend

How a baby-faced band of Afropop-loving Ivy Leaguers shot to the top of the indie-rock heap before they even released an album—and what this says about the new speed of buzz.

BY ANDY GREENWALD

68 Chicago Hip-hop

Crash a raucous house party with the brightest stars of the Windy City's underground hip-hop scene: Flosstradamus, the Cool Kids, Dude 'N Nem, Kid Sister, and, um, a cardboard Chewbacca. BY JESSICA HOPPER

78 The Spin Interview: Stephen Malkmus

These days, the ex-Pavement leader favors bluesy prog jams over indie-pop anthems and is more likely to frequent Gymboree than dis high-on-the-hog rock stars. But he's still as contrary as ever. BY DOUGLAS WOLK

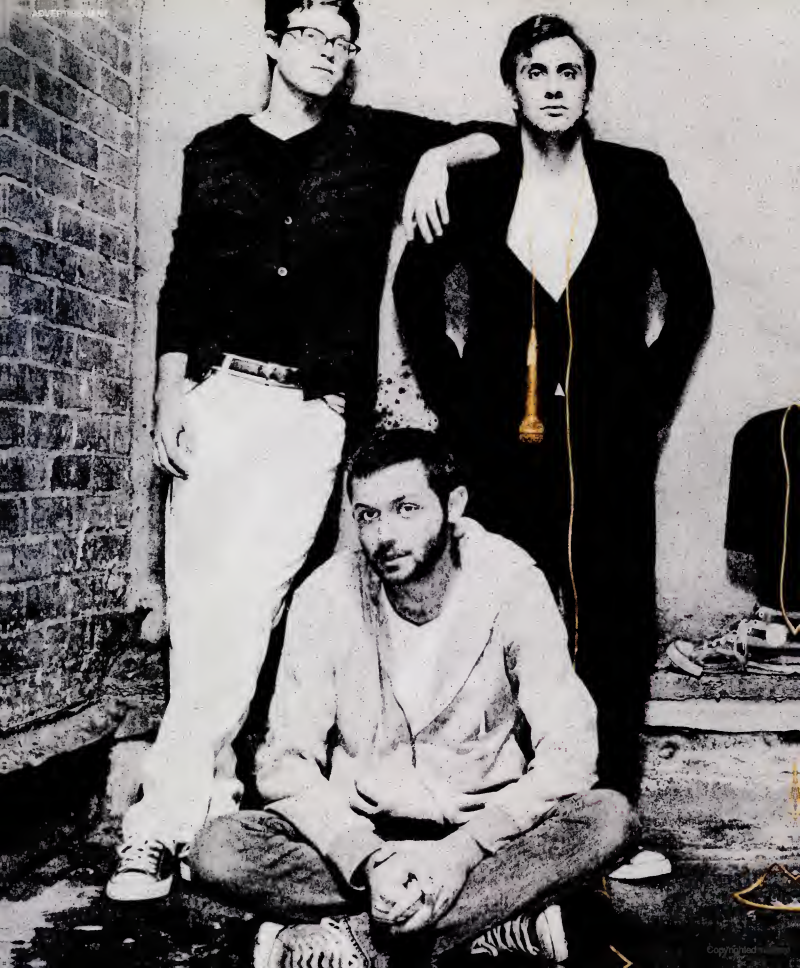
84 Paramore

Looking at these young pop-punk heroes, it's easy to focus all your attention on lead spitfire Hayley Williams. But do it at your own risk—this spitfire is taking shooting lessons. BY NICOLE KEIPER

"We want to do something that isn't stuck-up and lets people get loose."

AUTOBOT (RIGHT) OF FLOSTRADAMUS, PAGE 70





HARLEM SHAKES NYC, JANUARY 10, 2008

On the heels of last year's self-released *Burning Birthdays* EP, Brooklyn's Harlem Shakes are at it again. Currently in the studio, the garage-pap quintet—Lexy Benaim (vocals), Todd Goldstein (guitar), Jase Saegaard (bass), Kendrick Strauch (keys), and Brent Katz (drums)—are tackling their debut full-length, shooting for a release this fall. Check them out at harlemshakes.com.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY TAKU



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Why rock videos have gotten raunchy again; Human Giant say yes to threesomes; Be Your Own Pet let us into their rec room; Moby on nerds, haters, and stealing his own music; the Honor Roll; Asia Argento digs Fox News and Fassbinder; grizzled vets the Gutter Twins drink to the present; the Spin 20. PLUS: Switches, Laura Marling, and Airbourne are Breaking Out.

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Cincinnati has much more to its rock'n'roll pedigree than Dr. Johnny Fever and Venus Flytrap.

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Are one-album stands better than long-term relationships?

BY JEFF GORDINIER

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R.E.M.'s *Accelerate*, the Gutter Twins' *Saturnalia*, the Mountain Goats' *Heretic Pride*, the Raveonettes' *Lust Lust Lust*, Del the Funky Homosapien's *11th Hour*, Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks' *Real Emotional Trash*, Joe Hadden's *Mood Music III*, and dozens more! PLUS: Reissues and essential rockabilly.

110 Movies

The Bank Job, *Snow Angels*, *Paranoid Park*, and *Boarding Gate*

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Radiohead blitz London; Brit wit Kate Nash brings her grumpy dresses to L.A.

"I don't need to sell tons of records, but I want longevity."

LAURA MARLING, PAGE 54



MARC BY MARC JACOBS

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Fresh Blood

TIME WAS WHEN FANZINES, college radio stations, DIY touring, and, well, magazines like *Spin* were the keys to promoting spanking-new indie rock. Bands like Hüsker Dü, the Replacements, and Pavement all benefited from this loose but dedicated support network, which helped spawn careers that often spanned ten years and a half dozen albums or more.

Nowadays, thanks the Web's blinding immediacy, blogs (and *Spin.com*) may be where much new music gets buzzed-about and discovered. But the attendant churn rates and changing priorities of the gatekeepers mean that an artist's shelf life can end up unfairly diminished. With MP3s being posted and passed around like so much manna from demo heaven, is it any wonder that by the time a debut album comes out, a band may already be forgotten? What happens when the flavor of the day becomes yesterday's news? And how can bands better equip themselves to survive such daunting odds and enjoy a meaningful run?

In this month's cover story, Andy Greenwald profiles fast-rising blog favorites Vampire Weekend, whose debut album of infectiously jaunty Afro-inflected pop manages to make good on the prerelease buzz and strongly suggests they could break out of cyberspace and into the real world. Greenwald also explores the blog-band phenomenon, which makes it easy for even the greenest of artists to get noticed but more difficult than ever to sustain interest. In our hyperaccelerated culture, this is yet another area where, to quote noted cultural critic (and pop-star spouse) Heidi Klum, "one day you're in, the next you're out."

Someone forgot to tell that to Stephen Malkmus. In this issue's *Spin* Interview, the former Pavement frontman, who currently leads the Jicks, proves that a long-term career in indie rock can be entirely viable and uniquely rewarding.

Hope you enjoy the magazine.

Doug Brod

Doug Brod
Editor





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SPIN FLASH

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Host Adrian Brody



Miss Sixty/Energie Grand Opening

New York, NY
November 29, 2007

Actors, musicians, stylists, and VIPs attended the grand opening celebration of the first-ever New York City Miss Sixty/Energie flagship boutique in the historic Lord & Taylor building.

WHO

Host Adrian Brody and band members of the Last Goodnight enjoyed refreshments while DJ 24 Court provided the beats.



DJ 24 Court



SVEDKA New Year's Eve Celebration

Hotel Conservatory, New York City

Kid Rock hosted the Hotel Conservatory New Year's Eve bash hosted by Stereo owner Mike Salsky and restaurateur Jeff Chodorow.

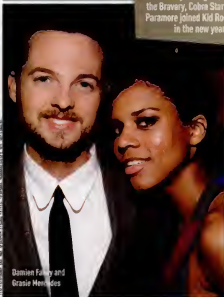
Mena Sovari, Fabulous, Ben McKenzie, MTV VJs Damien Fahey and Lindsay Rodriguez, and bands the Bravery, Colbie Corbett, and Paramore joined Kid Rock to ring in the new year.



Fabrizio



Kid Rock



Damien Fahey and Gracie Hennessey



DJ Rashad

PHOTOGRAPH BY JIMMY KIM; LAMBERTS WITH IMAGE COURTESY OF SIXTY SIX

INSIDE SPIN CONTRIBUTORS



Nicole Keiper

Writer, *Paramore* (page 84)

↑ Keiper, a 30-year-old writer for *The Tennessean*, was surprised by the maturity of the pop-punk sensations. "They have a directed focus on their lives," she says. "I've got 11 years on Hayley Williams, but I wanted to ask her advice on how to get my shit together!" Keiper also contributes to *Modern Drummer*. **Favorite Paramore song:** "Misery Business"



Miko Lim

Photographer, Chicago hip-hop (page 68)

← Lim, a resident of Tokyo, was struck by the laid-back vibe at the shoot for Chicago's newest hip-hop stars. "It had a family-reunion feel," he says. "Everyone was cozy and cool and poking fun at each other." Lim, whose work has appeared in *Nylon*, *ID*, and *Marie Claire*, recently directed his first TV commercial. **Favorite hip-hop album:** OutKast's *ATLiens*

Viki Forshee

Photographer, *Paramore* (page 84)

→ "There is a real sense of a united band," Forshee (bottom center) says of Paramore. "No one tries to be bigger or more noticed than the others. I didn't want to tell them how to pose, because they get into place and are just perfect." New Yorker Forshee, 35, has also shot for *Nylon*, *ID*, and *Elle*. **Favorite music at age 18:** Sick of It All, Edith Piaf



Andy Greenwald

Writer, *Vampire Weekend* (page 60)

← "They were outrageously young," Greenwald says of this month's cover stars. "Every time they mentioned a Radiohead album I loved in college, they were talking about middle school!" The 30-year-old Brooklynite is the author of *Miss Misery: A Novel* (Simon Spotlight). **Middle-school Atropop obsession:** Johnny Clegg, the "white Zulu" of South Africa.



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Three men in black suits stand on the edge of a globe against a blue background. The man on the left is bald and holds a razor. The man in the center has short dark hair and holds a razor. The man on the right has dark hair and holds a razor. They are all looking towards the camera.

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SPRINGSTEENSTRONGER?
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WEST
+ DAFT
PUNK

HOW THEY MADE THE SONG OF THE YEAR

40
BEST
ALBUMS20
BEST
SINGLES

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WATCH IT

WRITE IT

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93 FEET EAST, LONDON

Radiohead

Wednesday, January 16, 2008

"I'm glad it's not at the shop, actually," Thom Yorke told the crowd crammed inside the club where Radiohead relocated this "in-store" performance. "Fair play to Rough Trade, though, for putting up with [us]," he added, offering props to the record shop that presented the band's first *In Rainbows*-promoting public gig, their smallest turnout (200 diehards!) in a decade.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDY WILLISHER





THE TALKING HEAD CLUB, BALTIMORE

Spank Rock

Sunday, December 23, 2007

Held in a tiny, booze-stained dive, Spank Rock's annual hometown holiday bash isn't exactly wholesome. "There was crazy punk shit going on. People were sweating and pouring beer all over each other," says the randy rapper, a.k.a. Naeem Juwan. "Bringing people together like that is more important than the fact that it was Christmas. We fit 200 people in that shitty-ass little bar. The energy was perfect—like an eruption."

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK HAMILTON



RUBY SKYE, SAN FRANCISCO

Wu-Tang Clan

Thursday, December 27, 2007

Though Method Man's walk across palms may look spontaneous, it's actually the result of some careful calculation. "It's gotta be a jam-packed mosh-pit crowd," he says. "Everyone's gotta be stuck together, or you'll fall." Meth saves the move for a special moment at every Wu show, but he's not saying when. "If people know when I'm gonna do it," he explains, "they'll drop my ass."

PHOTOGRAPH BY MISHA VLADIMIRSKIY



Songs You Need to Download Now!

Go to **SPIN.com** for samples and links to these tunes, vid clips, and more



1 Teenie Bottlerocket "IN THE BASEMENT" Buzzy pop punk with no taint of "emo voice"! These Wyoming boys' latest roars, but their classic statement remains early scorcher "Bloodbath at Burger King."

2 Grand Archives "MINIATURE BIROS" Band of Horses cofounder Mat Brooke reemerges with his soothing new combo, and it's clear who was partial to the lighter, blithely whistling side of folky '70s pop.

3 Midnight Juggernauts "INTO THE GALAXY" This Aussie trio opened for Justice last year, but they're glam-pop showboats by comparison, with goopy synth crescendos galore, like Talk Talk at a drag-queen ball.

4 Missy Elliott "CHING-A-LING" Newcomers Arktiks & Lamb, doing Timbaland better than Tim, produce Missy's latest polyrhythmic free-for-all (in the "Get Ur Freak On," "Work It," "Lose Control" tradition).

5 Gangsta Rap "IN MY HOUSE SHOES" From the film spoof *Gangsta Rap: The Glockumentary*, this gut-bustin' version of the Jungle Brothers' "I'll House You" explains why "you never see the OG in the hard soles."

6 Why? "CLOSE TO ME" Yoni Wolf's abstract indie crew takes the Cure's perkier '80s pop confection and brilliantly exhumes its core of fuzzily regretful, tense, 4 A.M. soul-searching.

7 Neon Neon "I TOLD HER ON ALDERAAN" Super Furry Animals' Gruff Rhys joins up with experimental hip-hop producer Boom Bip and unveils a lovely, warped electro-pop anthem evoking *Star Wars* romance.

8 Glasvegas "FLOWERS AND FOOTBALL TOPS" Wide-eyed shoegaze doo-wop Britpop with enough echo to make the Ronettes dizzy. Alan McGee calls 'em the "best Scottish band since the Mary Chain," and he's close.

9 The Dodos "FOOLS" With furious acoustic strumming and minimal percussion clicks, plus some sawing atmospherics and trombone blurts, this San Francisco duo create a heady swirl of emotional who-knows-what.

10 Wolfkin "THESE ARE ALL ILLUSIONS" Two dapper Danish indie poppers, who seem to have done their time at the hipster license-plate factory, masterfully mingle Kraftwerk and the Beatles as if it's a weekend lark.

11 Fink "BLUEBERRY PANCAKES" Like a Proust madeleine, the thought of an ex's flapjacks sets off this U.K. trip-hopper turned singer/songwriter. Before long, he's crying in his Stella and poring over old love letters.

12 F--k Buttons "BRIGHT TOMORROW" Conjure a pensive, disorienting mood. Obliterate it with obscene waves of noise that scream for either earplugs or drugs. Wait for crowd to say, *Fuuuuck!*

13 Prodigy "MY WORLD IS EMPTY WITHOUT YOU" Prison-bound and wracked by sickle cell, the Long Island vet raps his own pitted history lesson over the Supremes' wail: "Fuck the Vatican, the pyramids is older."

14 Shipwreck "RABBIT IN THE KITCHEN" With a searing guitar riff, rhythmic finesse, and assured vocal yearn that most indie types can't approach, these Illinois rockers are almost mesmerizingly sophisticated.

15 Jeans Team "BABY 3" The Berlin techno-funk quartet have been geeking around since the mid-'90s, and the experience shows: This thumping beepfest is taut as a (real) drum, with scads of infectious melodic bits.



Must-See Videos

Goldfrapp

"A&E"

It would seem logical to set this glimmering electronic ballad against a sunlit autumnal forest inhabited by a beautiful nymph—until, that is, you remember that this is a Goldfrapp video. The subtle irony of leaf men emerging from the "natural" surroundings to dance around singer Alison Goldfrapp keeps the whole thing grounded, without diminishing the admittedly lovely visual effect.

Ice Cube

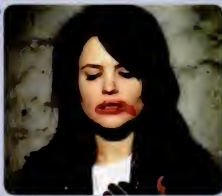
"Gangsta Rap Made Me Do It"

Though the simple thesis and somewhat stale flow make the track easy to disregard, the video's visual name-checking of the past decade's major media events proves surprisingly effective. Cube's tough-as-nails demeanor as he smokes his stogie and "gits livin'" proves once again that the man can intimidate the pants off of us without bling, booty, or a Bentley.

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds

"Dig, Lazarus, Dig!!!"

Cave struts, preens, and pontificates before black and white rear-projection, narrating the story of a man who travels from New York to California and back, growing "increasingly neurotic and obscene." He may be putting us on with his preacher-like gestures and insistence that there's "something going on upstairs," but damned if we aren't watching.



The Kills

"URA Fever"

The first single from *Midnight Boom* gets a split-screen treatment as Jamie and Alison frolic solo in the same locations, seemingly thwarted in their attempts to connect (a few playful poses and tussles notwithstanding). Given the track's heavy beat, raunchy guitar, and trademark sultry delivery, this may be a good thing: If the smoldering pair ever did hook up, the whole place might catch fire.

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Best of the West

After seeing your Best of 2007 issue ["Kanye West and Daft Punk," January], I could not have asked for a better cover. Daft Punk and Kanye were without a doubt the entertainers of the year! The articles on these performers were pure excellence.

PATTY ORTIZ
CHICAGO HEIGHTS, ILLINOIS

I don't see how Kanye West plans to become the "No. 1" artist when he continues to isolate himself with his use of labels and stereotypes. A real artist should not think only in terms of skin color.

JD DALY
NEW YORK CITY

I was very disappointed after reading the interview with Kanye West. He is going to have a hard time being mentioned alongside artists like U2 and the Rolling Stones, as he hopes in the article, if he continues to act no better than my 12-year-old students in the middle of a sugar fit. I'll give him some of the same advice I would give them: Stop whining. Put in a little more time, act like an adult once or twice, and be respectful of your peers.

MARIEL STOTTS
AUSTIN, TEXAS



For or Against Me?

At first I was hesitant to see Against Me!'s *New Wave* as the album of the year ["The 40 Best Albums of 2007," January], considering the minimal attention it got from its own scene. But as I went back and listened, it occurred to me that Against Me! isn't the problem—the scene is.

MATT SUTHERLAND
BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA

Glow Sticks

How dare you not put Klaxons on your best-albums list? They started new rave! Don't say it was just an "England thing." I was at their first gig in L.A., and every store I go to sells Klaxonified outfits now. How could you fail to include the band that started a whole scene?

DEB VASQUEZ
LOS ANGELES

Rhythm Nation

Just wanted to let you know that the percussion rhythms in M.L.A.'s song "Bird Flu" ["20 Best Songs," January] are not African, but Tamil from southern India. M.L.A. herself is of Tamil descent from Sri Lanka. Even though I'm not Tamil myself, I've watched dozens of Tamil (Kollywood) movies and recognized the music immediately.

ANTHONY MUTHON
MOUNT VERNON, NEW YORK

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We sent our video crew down to Nashville to trail Paramore during their *Spin* photo shoot. Tag along with us as the band members visit record stores and talk about guns.

spin.com/paramore-video

→ SXSW MUSIC FESTIVAL

They are probably the five most important days in rock each year, and we've got them covered from all angles. Check out performance videos, interviews, and editors' blogs from Austin, Texas' South by Southwest (March 12–16).

spin.com/sxsw08

→ BREAKING OUT

Watch exclusive performance videos from two of this month's Breaking Out artists: Switches and Laura Marling (who covers Neil Young's "The Needle and the Damage Done").

spin.com/switches-video

spin.com/marling-video

→ MORE MOBY

Read an extended version of his *Inquisition* Q&A and check out highlights from his own blog.

spin.com/moby-interview

The SPIN.com Poll

Online buzz helped propel Vampire Weekend onto our cover. How much new music do you discover via websites and blogs?

- A Every single note
- B The majority of my collection
- C A decent amount
- D An MP3 here and there
- F The internet is the devil's network

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NOISE

MUSIC NEWS AND MORE, PLAYED AT FULL BLAST

A touching moment
from Endeverafter's
"Baby Baby Baby" clip



INDECENT EXPOSURE

What's the fastest way to make a video go viral? Add some T&A.



BY GREG MILNER

It's uncensored, so if you're focused, you might see a nipple," says Marion Raven, introducing her video "Heads Will Roll" on the online network No Good TV (ngtv.com).

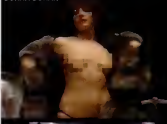
Actually, you don't have to pay very close attention at all. The clip, in which Raven sings atop a writhing mass of women, features several areolas—although, as Raven points out, none of them are hers. "And we do have a version without the nipples," she adds.

If you're focused, you might see topless women in a lot of music videos these days—though not on your television. NGTV's Dirty Music Video channel has emerged as the Internet's leading provider of T&A-filled music clips—from the naughty schoolgirl fantasy of Everdeaf's "Baby Baby Baby" to the simulated oral sex (lesbian, naturally) of Circus Diablo's "Loaded" to Everclear's blasphemous "Hater," in which Jesus is portrayed as a hedonistic cad. "We won't show X-rated stuff," says Benjie Gordon, No Good's head of music programming. "We don't mind nudity, but no penetration."

"No Good TV takes the point of view that you're a grown-up, and you can edit yourself," adds Kiss' Gene Simmons, an investor in the site. "We don't do pedophilia and bestiality, but that's about it." Even on that last point, NGTV pushes the envelope. The clip for Nick Cave's Grinderman track "No Pussy Blues," for example, juxtaposes footage of *Homo sapiens* hoochies with hot giraffe-on-giraffe action.

Given that MTV and to a lesser extent VH1 and BET broadcast more reality-show marathons than actual music videos—much less potentially offensive ones—the Web has become a petri dish for R-rated experimentation. Over the past couple of years, artists as diverse as Britney Spears, Marilyn Manson, and 50 Cent have released "uncensored" clips online. Recent highlights include videos featuring girl-on-girl makeout sessions (Sliman Mobile Disco's "Hustler"), stomach-churning torture porn (the Wildhearts' "Destiny All Monsters"), and webcam strutting (Pittsburgh Slim's "Girls Kiss Girls"). How to explain this boom in titillation? It attracts curious eyeballs, duh, and lots of them. It's a staple of what we do," says Allen Kovac, president of Eleven Seven Music, which has adopted the provocative-video approach for several of its artists, including Everclear and Buckcherry. "It's a way of having an audience without asking radio to create one."

DURAN DURAN



DAVID BOWIE



R.E.M.



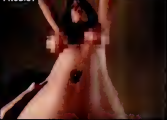
MADONNA



NINE INCH NAILS



PRODIGY



Blue Screens

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RACY MUSIC VIDEOS

1982

Duran Duran
GIRLS ON FILM

Topless women walk on fashion runways, wrestle in mud, play around in inflatable tubs, and flip a sumo wrestler in the ring. "Rio" was actually sexier.

1983

David Bowie
CHINA GIRL

Bowie and model Geelting Big reenact *From Here to Eternity*'s famous beach scene. A flash of the Thin White Duke's bow tie keeps this one off the air.

1989

R.E.M.
P.O.M. 89

Three topless women gaze behind a shirtless Michael Stipe (who also directed). The MTV-approved cut has black bars over everyone's chest.

1990

Madonna
JUSTIFY MY LOVE

Madge wanders into various risqué scenarios in a hotel, including an S&M liaison, a threesome, and the application of fake mustaches.

1994

Nine Inch Nails
CLOSER

The spurning heart, the rotating pig's head, and the emaciated naked bald woman make this Mark Romanek-directed clip more icky than titillating.

1997

Prodigy
SMACK MY BITCH UP

A hyperkinetic trip through a truly debauched evening with a surprise reveal at the end. (Spoiler alert: The bitch-smacker is a woman!) G.M.

Given the ease of finding both film and free music online, maybe the most shocking thing about this trend is that it didn't happen sooner.

The idea of making an "uncensored" video, one that MTV would never play, is as old as MTV itself. Duran Duran, whose rise to superstardom was aided by the network, shot a version of "Girls on Film" that clearly had no chance of making it past the censors. David Bowie surely knew that including his own bare ass in the "China Girl" clip would keep it off the air. These versions were never just in spite of, but also because of MTV's

unwillingness to play them. Their existence created a buzz, and their occasional showings, at clubs or on late-night cable, lent the artists a hint of edginess.

Even today, mainstream Web portals like AOL and Yahoo won't touch these kinds of uncensored clips—not that any of this nudty-filled footage is made with prime-time viewing in mind—but sites like Dailymotion and Spike TV's iFilm channel make them available to anyone with a high-speed Internet connection. Buckcherry's "Crazy Bitch" even had its world premiere on punk-porn

"It's a way of having an audience without asking radio to create one."

ALLEN KOVAC, PRESIDENT,
ELEVEN SEVEN MUSIC

portal *SuicideGirls.com*, part of a carefully orchestrated viral marketing plan. "Those were some of the funniest marketing meetings I've ever sat in," says Katie McNeill, Buckcherry's manager at the time. "Never in my life had I heard people say things like 'We're getting a lot of hits on Drunken Stepfather and Dumpsterluts.com.'"

"Crazy Bitch," widely credited for launching the current trend of uncensored videos, is a case study in how much promotional heft a smutty video can have. After struggling to replicate the success of their first and last hit, 1999's paean to cocaine, "Lit Up," Buckcherry returned in 2006 with "Crazy Bitch." The chorus alone—"You're a crazy bitch / But you fuck so good I'm on top of it"—made it a tough sell for any mainstream outlet. The video, which featured strippers dancing, grinding, and, well, stripping, was shot for just \$5,000 at Los Angeles' Key Club. (Shooting without real actors has a downside: The group and their label were sued in 2006 by a minor who claims she was coerced into baring her breasts in the clip.) After it spread swiftly around the Internet, satellite and eventually terrestrial radio began spinning a heavily edited version of the song. By early 2008, Buckcherry's latest album, *15*, had sold a million copies. "It was never intended to be a single," says McNeill. "It was just meant to reconnect with their audience. We knew that if we made a dirty video, people would want to see it."

Some might call these videos a cheap marketing gimmick, but others consider them a great opportunity. "We realized MTV wasn't going to play our video because we ain't female and we ain't 16," says Circus Diablo's Billy Morrison. "So we wrote the song we wanted to write, and told the tale we wanted to tell." He pauses. "Which happened to include chicks running around naked."



Vestal

ALL DETAILS POSTED: VESTALWATCH.COM



T I M E I S W H A T Y O U M A K E O F I T



Finally, American Apparel has gone too far.

The Power of Three

Human Giant, "the blink-182 of comedy," pick their favorite rock trios

While your Kids in the Halls and your Monty Pythons prefer to make funny in large gangs, and your Flight of the Conchords and your Little Britains prefer to work in more intimate pairs, Human Giant—currently launching the second season of their eponymous MTV series—constitute the rare three-man sketch-comedy act. "You always need a third guy to break the tie," says Rob Huebel, 38. "It's easier to split the drugs and the money three ways," adds Aziz Ansari, 25. "If you're in the Polyphonic Spree, maybe you get a hundred bucks a show." But Paul Scheer, 32, best sums up his troupe's place in the pantheon: "We're the blink-182 of comedy." Since it takes one to know one, Human Giant humbly present the three (natch) powerfulest power trios of all time. **STEVE KANDELL**

ZZ TOP



"ZZ Top is the best power trio of all time," counters Huebel. "For a band to become famous solely because of their enormous beards is an achievement. And they have a drummer named Beard, but he only has a mustache." **Plus:** says Scheer, "Back to the Future Part III proved they could rock just as hard in 1985 as they did in 1985."

MOTÖRHEAD



"You can't get more badass than Motörhead," says Scheer. "You're never gonna see them do Leno like the Sex Pistols did—that was terrible. Even their website is permanently stuck in the '80s; it's awesome. Although Lemmy's war might count as its own person, in which case, they wouldn't qualify."

LOS TRI-O



The indie aesthete of the group has a more exotic pick. "Los Tri-O are like a three-man version of Los Lonely Boys," says Ansari. "And they're so dedicated to the concept of a trio, they even made it part of their name. They've got a smooth Latin sound, and the music transports you to another place." "That's true," says Huebel. "A Latin place."

Buzzcatcher

UNDER THE RADAR AND BLASTING FROM OUR OFFICES

Dead Confederate

WHO: This Athens, Georgia quintet mine the dark side of Dixie; guitars quiver and burble, the singer's had a few too many Marlboro Reds, and the drums charge into oblivion. **BOOK THEM FOR YOUR NEXT MIDNIGHT BBQ. LATEST:** *Dead Confederate EP (Razor & Tie)* **FOR FANS OF:** Drive-By Truckers, Dinosaur Jr.

The Heavy

WHO: From an English city best known for its restorative ancient baths—that would be Bath, of course—comes a cast-iron groove-rock quintet whose mix of frazzle and funk gives off an instantaneous contact high. Superfly and superfun. **LATEST:** *Great Vengeance and Furious Fire (Counter+1)*; out in April **FOR FANS OF:** Funkadelic, Big Chief



Foals ↑

WHO: Both math majors and art-school fops will dig this Oxford, England quintet. The long-division time signatures and sci-fi keyboards are for geeking out; the braying choruses and Afro-funk guitars are for bustin' loose. **LATEST:** *Antidotes (Sub Pop)*; out in April **FOR FANS OF:** The Rapture, Klaxons

The Menahan Street Band

WHO: Their name might not be familiar, but you may already know this Brooklyn crew's first single, thanks to Jay-Z, who sampled their woozy Afro-soul tune "Make the Road by Walking" on the comeback cut "Roc Boys (And the Winner Is)." Featuring some of the same players from the now-world-famous horn posse the Dap-Kings (Amy Winehouse, Sharon Jones). **LATEST:** *Make the Road by Walking (Dunham)*; out this spring **FOR FANS OF:** Fela Kuti, Maceo Parker



At some point in time a man switches from
"I'll have what he's having" to "I'll have what I'm having."

Drink Life Deeply



small

Continued on next page



1 OPEN

MORE ABOUT BYOP

Sitting in the Nashville house where they formed, the Young Men put reminiscence about their early years, all the way back in 2002. "Jonas was the only one with a driver's license," recalls Jermina Pearl. "He'd drive us all here, we'd practice until dinner, then our parents would pick us up." Now with a second album, a spunky blast of garage punk called *Get Awkward* (Estatic Peace), BYOP have moved on to a more professional practice space. "My mom misses us," says Jonas Stein.

Be Your Own Pet

Inside the punk brats' rehearsal space at guitarist Jonas Stein's parents' house

John Eatherly, Nathan Vasquez, Jonas Stein, and Jemima Pearl, photographed for Spin in Nashville, January 11, 2008

1 NEON SIGN Jonas Stein: "My dad used to own a restaurant, but it failed. I kidnapped this before he could sell it." Nathan Vasquez: "It was the only light source when we would practice."

2 ZAAT MOVIE POSTER Stein: "This is for a '70s monster movie my mom was in. This one guy who is obsessed with the movie came to Nashville to get her autograph on a few things and left us with two posters."

3 MACHETE Vasquez: "We use the machete to cut down thorn plants when we go hiking. Especially during the night—it's the biggest pain in the balls to walk into thorns all of a sudden."

4 BUZZCOCKS POSTER Stein: "They are my favorite punk band. I really like the mouths in place of the nipples—" Jemima Pearl: "Don't say nipples."

5 SCHECTER GUITAR Stein: "This is my favorite guitar. I didn't know that much about the company; I just saw it in a store and bought it impulsively."

6 MANNEQUIN HEAD AND NURSE HAT Pearl: "The head I found at an antique mall—I had been looking for one for a while. The nurse hat is from my Halloween costume, which I first wore onstage at a show in Oxford, England. I also wore it on New Year's, in a hot tub."

7 THE RUNAWAYS' QUEENS OF NOISE Pearl: "Thurston [Moore]'s friend owns a record store in Massachusetts, and we went there right around my birthday. This album was, like, \$40, and when I went up to the register, [Moore] said, 'There's a sale on Runaways records today, right?' And he just gave it to me."

8 SKATEBOARDS Stein: "I usually like to have one on tour, but I haven't been able to ride, because I need to put some wheels and trucks on these decks. All my hardware got stolen at South by Southwest last year."

9 FOUR-TRACK RECORDER John Eatherly: "I got in on eBay for \$80, and we recorded most of the first album on it. It's my baby." Vasquez: "It's captured everything we've done, no matter how horribly awry or slightly better."

10 KEYBOARD Pearl: "I found that at a thrift store in Nashville for, like, \$7 this summer. It has so many switches and awesome things."

BY MICHELLE EGIZIANO





RIO IS SO BEAUTIFUL WE MUST WORK HARD
TO MAKE PEOPLE LOOK AT THEIR FEET

havaianas

Moby

Not since the early '90s has anyone been as enthusiastic about New York City nightlife as Moby seems to be. Perched on the edge of the couch in his surprisingly small SoHo apartment, the 42-year-old techno-vegan eagerly admits what few other rave veterans would: *Last Night*, his new album, could very well have been recorded during the Clinton presidency. "I've been going to clubs pretty steadily since 1981, which is potentially depressing, but it still interests me," he says. "I wanted to make a record that would remind me of that period of my life."

Are you worried that people will criticize you for making a retro record?

No, that was intentional. The idea was to take an eight-hour night out and condense it into 65 minutes. You wouldn't listen to a White Stripes record and say, "This should have been made in 1971."

Does it bother you that neither of the two records you've released since 1999's *Play* have sold as well?

Not at all. *Play* was such an accident. A record made by a 34-year-old bald guy in his bedroom featuring dead African American vocalists? It's not a recipe for success. My only professional regret is that [2002's follow-up] *18* was fairly conventional. I was trying to make something that would appeal to people, when I should have thrown that criterion out the window.

Of all of the songs from *Play* that were licensed, what struck you as the weirdest placement?

For a while, Rush Limbaugh was using some of my music. Finally, I think someone called him up and said, "You know, Moby is kind of a hard-core lefty."

What was more upsetting: when your childhood friend director Paul Yates auctioned your soul on eBay, or when it went for \$43?

It was very disheartening to see someone I really liked...become so hostile. I lent Paul money to do [the 2004 film *Mean Streets*], and I think he did

everything in his power to use it to embarrass me. Like having my character wear a yellow raincoat with a dildo attached to my head playing Christmas songs? It's not one of my prouder moments. Luckily, not too many people have seen the movie.

There are some raunchy photos on the Internet of a party you hosted at your upstate house. Were you getting in touch with your sleazier side?

That was staged. I had a New Year's Eve party, and some friends made this joke photo essay about a really degenerate party. The naked girls in the hot tub and the girl with Ecstasy on her tongue—which I think was Boyer aspirin—they were just trying to be funny.

Do you think your romance with Natalie Portman helped make nerds into sex symbols?

I guess in some people's eyes, [nerds] might be mildly sexy—and, as a nerd, I'm certainly happy to enjoy some of the effects of that—but as far as the very brief affair I had with Natalie, it's made me the target of a lot of nerd wrath. You can't date Luke Skywalker's mom and not have them hate your guts.

Do you illegally download music?

Oh yeah, all the time. I download my own, because

I have this perverse fantasy of the FBI bursting through the door and arresting me for stealing it. I don't advocate for it, but I will say that as music becomes less profitable, music becomes a lot better. The old days of starting a band because you want to be rich and famous are falling by the wayside.

Isn't that easier to say now that you have a lot of money?

You could say that invalidates my perspective, but I walked the walk; I lived in an abandoned factory with no hot water. To an extent, I am being a hypocrite; but you can be a hypocrite and still be right.

As a frequent blogger, you've probably read some of the insults that have been directed at you. What accounts for the persistent Moby hatred?

I'm way too visible. Musicians are supposed to be vague and esoteric, like Thom Yorke. If I were a weird Finnish musician, I don't think anyone would hate me, except maybe the people in my village in Finland.

Are there any drugs you haven't done?

I've never done DMT. It only lasts 30 minutes, but apparently it's so intense that it gives you an out-of-body experience. I've never smoked crack. And I did crystal meth by accident once, but that I never need to do again. I don't like drugs that don't end.

BY PHOEBE REILLY





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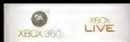


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The Honor Roll

THESE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE THINGS

PERIODICAL PIECE

Inspired by origami and record clubs, *The Journal of Popular Noise* (popularnoise.net) is a "semiannual audio magazine" featuring a trio of exclusive seven-inch singles. In the new issue: the obscure electronica doodlers Teflon Don, Copy, and Pontius Pilots. Also, it'll look cool on a coffee table—take that, MP3 file!



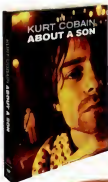
YACHT FROCK

Display your adoration for Linda Ronstadt with this tank top from music-themed T-shirt company *Rotter and Friends* (rotterandfriends.com). Does this mean Williamsburgers will start listening to "Different Drum" now?



REACHING NIRVANA

Featuring Spin contributor Michael Azerrad's interviews set to impressionistic images of the rocker's adolescent haunts and Ben Gibbard's spaghetti Northwestern score, *Kurt Cobain: About a Son* (Shout! Factory) is less a documentary than a journey through Cobain's memories.



RADIO NOWHERE

The Best of LCD (Princeton Architectural Press) has nothing to do with disco punk. Collecting the best of tastemaking New Jersey free-form radio station WFUM's program guide (named *Lowest Common Denominator*), this volume features wiggled-out comics and surreal humor pieces from the likes of Daniel Clowes, Nick Tosches, and Peter Bagge.



DOPE STUFF

The King of Chronic lends his name to a set of \$400 Beats by Dr. Dre headphones from AV cable king Monster (monstercable.com). The oversize cans are suitably bass-heavy with an extrawide headband, making them stable even during vigorous head-nodding.

BUGGIN' OUT

Music-loving entomologists—or Cuteoverload.com addicts—will drool over Vestalife's *Ladybug* (vesta-life.com) iPod speaker dock, shaped like the only insect that isn't even slightly repulsive.



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"If there's a scene in a movie where I have to cry, I use what I call 'sadcore' music [to prepare]. Cat Power is always great for that. But you just want to kill yourself when you listen to it."



"When I was eight, I was so obsessed with Tears for Fears that for my birthday, my father [director Dario Argento] took me to their concert in Milan. I wore this skinny tie with ridiculous musical notes on it. I was in love with [singer] Roland Orzabal, which is unbelievable to me today: a little girl with all these fantasies about a guy named Roland."



"For ten years I didn't even have a TV, but sometimes when I'm really depraved, I watch Fox News. I know it's completely manipulative, but at least I get to know what Britney is doing every day. It's not even about the news. It's like a complete lobotomy."



Asia Argento

The guide to how entertainers entertain themselves. This month: The filmmaker and *Boarding Gate* star.



"I love the grandiosity of Rainer Werner Fassbinder. In 15 years he made more than 40 movies, but none of them feel thrown away. I recently had to go to several film festivals here in Europe, and it was torturous how boring the movies were. I felt like I was getting raped by European cinema for a week."



"I read *Death of the Installment Plan*, by Louis-Ferdinand Céline, more than once. Céline is very funny and, at the same time, he tells you really hard-core things about his childhood. There's almost a sickness to it, like he has to share as much as possible."



"The tattoo I have on my neck—the 237 I had this mystic reasoning for it, but it was all bullshit, as you can see from the terrible movie with Jim Carrey about the number 23. I would love to get rid of it because of that."



"Roman Polanski is one of the best horror directors out there. There's something about *The Tenant* that scares me to my bones. The main character goes to live in an apartment where a woman committed suicide, and he ends up becoming this woman. You really don't see much, but it's the atmosphere and the little recurring details, like a tooth hidden in a hole in the wall, that creep me out."



"I'm a fan and a friend of Sonic Youth. They were very kind to give me music for a movie I directed [*The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Things*]. To me, the sound of Sonic Youth is the sound of the nervous system—or tinnitus."

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NOISE

Up From the Gutter

With 40-odd years in rock between them, the Gutter Twins' **Greg Dulli** and **Mark Lanegan** have two lifetimes' worth of war stories. But rather than rehash their checkered pasts, they'd prefer to let the music do the growling.

Greg Dulli and
Mark Lanegan,
photographed for
Spin in Los Angeles,
December 21, 2007

PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM FOWLKS

When we went into the studio, we had nothing," says Greg Dulli, 42, the former Afghan Whigs and current Twilight Singers frontman, from a corner booth at Footsie's, one of two Los Angeles bars he owns. Dulli is talking about *Saturnalia*, the haunting new goth-blues album he made with Mark Lanegan, 43, late of Screaming Trees, under the appropriately seedy nom de rock the Gutter Twins. And though he means that the two men hadn't written any songs before they started work on the record in 2003, they hardly went into the studio with *nothing*: Over the two decades since they were at the forefront of the tumultuous alt-rock feeding frenzy, the grunge-era survivors have traveled parallel paths through major-label near-starodom, postbreakup tussles with drug addiction, and subsequent reinvention as respected, battle-scarred career artists. Now that their paths have intersected, however—Lanegan was also a touring member of the Twilight Singers in 2006—they aren't interested in reliving the bad old days, and if they've cleaned up their acts, they certainly haven't mellowed. "I've had some clowns ask me questions and they get stone-walled," says Dulli, nursing a Pacifico. "If it's shock-value exploitive shit you're after, go fuck yourself."

SPIN: When did you guys actually meet?

DULLI: [To Lanegan] I met you in '89 at a party in Seattle. But it was just sort of a "hi, how are you?" I had seen his band play a couple times.

LANEGAN: We'd actually played together.

DULLI: We had?

LANEGAN: In Boston.

DULLI: That's right—with Primus.

SPIN: That's a weird bill. The Whigs and the Trees sharing a stage makes sense, though; both your bands deviated from the grunge template in interesting ways.

DULLI: I think that's probably what helped us be friends in the first place—there was a common thread. And once both did a similar kind of get-in-the-van-with-your-guys thing—you were your own roadie and tour manager. We also both went from independent labels to major labels and then back again. Our career trajectories are eerily similar. We've compared notes: "Did you do this? Did you play here? Did you meet her?"

LANEGAN: Yes, yes, and yes.

SPIN: Each of you made it through relatively unscathed from a wild era in which your bands seemed like the hottest thing on the planet.

LANEGAN: Neither one of us was ever the hottest thing on the planet.

SPIN: But you were part of a cultural moment bigger than yourselves.

DULLI: It was a cultural moment, but there were stars shooting higher in that galaxy. And because we were able to forge through it, we had nothing to live down later.

SPIN: Do you feel fortunate in retrospect to not have been in, say, Nirvana?

LANEGAN: Yeah. Having seen it happen to those guys, I definitely think it makes it a lot harder to make music, for some reason.

DULLI: Nothing against either of our first groups, but I like what he does better now, and I like what I do better now. I feel like I spent all that time learning. It was an apprenticeship, a really long one. Whereas some of those guys, like Kurt [Cobain], caught lightning in a bottle.

SPIN: That said, you're still referred to as "former Afghan Whigs frontman" and "former Screaming Trees frontman." Is that a drag?

DULLI: No, because it makes people come to your concert and find out what you're doing now. All you want to do as a musician is have people have an experience with you. I'll be "former Ross Rams shooting guard," you know? I was that, too.

LANEGAN: "Former Texaco employee."

DULLI: "Former ICA stockboy."

SPIN: Does it make it hard to keep the focus on your current work when people like me are

always asking you to look back on your past?

DULLI: I don't want it, now I do what I do—that's the way I look at it. I can't take back what happened, but I can have something to do with what happens next.

LANEGAN: I prefer to try to stay in the here and now—it's a lot healthier.

SPIN: The Gutter Twins are hitting the road this year. Is touring a different experience for you guys now than it was when you were in your 20s?

DULLI: When Mark was in the Twilight Singers, we were hands down the oldest guys. After the show, the band and the crew would go out, but we'd go read or watch movies on the bus. I remember after a show in Albuquerque, this white stretch limo pulls up alongside the bus and four hot chicks pop out. They had champagne and short skirts, and they wanna meet me and Mark. It looked kind of fun, but we couldn't come out; I think we were watching a basketball game. So the limo pulls away with the rest of the band in it, and Mark turns to me and goes, "Wow, what happened to us?" That defines the two of us now.

SPIN: Are you cool with that?

DULLI: I got a vicarious thrill from the stories when they came back. "Did you do this? Did you do that?"

LANEGAN: Much like George Kennedy in *Cool Hand Luke*.

DULLI: Exactly. "Then what happened, kid?"

SPIN: Is that attitude a product of already having—

DULLI: Completely chewed the scenery? For me, yeah. I can't do it anymore.

SPIN: Can't or don't want to?

DULLI: I probably could, gun to my head, and scare the shit out of everybody with my capacity for doing it. But I guess I just don't want to.

LANEGAN: I enjoy touring more now.

DULLI: I do, too. Now it has a structure to it: You get on the bus, and the bus is your home and your coworkers are your family. I have three businesses, and I also like to travel not for work. But I always make time for it, and now I look forward to each day, whereas I used to be sleeping off a bender.

SPIN: Are other things in your lives as or more important than music?

LANEGAN: Basketball—that's about it for me.

DULLI: Your relationship with your lady.

LANEGAN: Normal shit.

DULLI: I find I'm more three-dimensional than I used to be. When I was 25 years old, I was a one-dimensional—

LANEGAN: Knuckthead? That's what I was.

MIKEAL WOOD

SPIN MORE AT SPIN.COM For a video interview with Greg Dulli, log on to spin.com/guttertwins

The Spin Ranking on Pop Culture Since 1998

- 1 **NATALIE IMBRUGLIA AND SILVERCHAIR'S DANIEL JONES DIVORCING** Which one gets custody of 1997?
- 2 **DMX PLANS GOSPEL ALBUM** Nothing halves a man find religion like 2,327 unpaid traffic tickets
- 3 **SOUTH BY SOUTHWEST 2008** We'd like to apologize in advance for any hair and/or BBQ left in the Jacuzzi
- 4 **ICKY PHRASES LIKE "MAN DATE" AND "MANCATION"** They're driving us bananas!
- 5 **SITAR HERO** Could someone please invent this? We're oh so eager to play "Don't Come Around Here No More."
- 6 **THE B-SZ'S RETURN!** Sadly, the Love Shack was bought, flipped, and turned into a Piercing Pagoda three years ago
- 7 **RADIOHEAD'S GREEN TOUR** So environmentally conscious they're not even playing "Fake Plastic Trees"
- 8 **WEBBIE** To clarify, he's a rapper, not an award given to Cindy Margolis in 2000
- 9 **THE CRACKDOWN ON .RAR BLOGS** Delaying music-stealing by a good three to five seconds
- 10 **INSOMNIA'S HARSH SIDE** Effects Grogginess, crankiness, and lots of Byron Allen
- 11 **THE LAST-EVER EPISODE OF THE WIRE** Can't wait for HBO's new spin-off, *I Got It on Wee-Wee*
- 12 **FRED DURST'S DIRECTORIAL DEBUT** Released He was really more of the DP on that sex tape



- 13 **FERGIE TO PLAY HOUSTON RODEO** They're not booing, they're mooing! Wait—they are booing.
- 14 **SCRABULOUS MANIA DESCENDS** Almost as addictive as *Sitar Hero*
- 15 **TAYLOR HICKS DROPPED BY 1 RECORDS** The Soul Patrol has been downgraded to a two-person escort
- 16 **JORDIN SPARKS' "SHY BOY"** Quick, release this progeek track as a single before you get dropped, too!
- 17 **WILMER VALDERRAMA ENTERTAINS THE TROOPS** OVERSEAS His finger-banging anecdotes are much better than Morgan Freeman's
- 18 **WRESTLEMANIA XXIV** Please, please, don't let Iron Sheik make the opening remarks
- 19 **THE IMMINENT SKA-PUNK REUNION** So long as Skankin' Pickle don't get the Coachella reunion band slot, we'll allow it
- 20 **BEING OSTRACIZED FOR HATING JUNKO** No one calls us on our hamburger phone anymore

ILLUSTRATION BY CAMERON STEWART

Switches

"Melodic, sexy" neo-Britpopers turn on the hooks

Custom guitars are generally known as the twin-necked, coffin-shaped preserve of famous fret-wankers, not preschool kids from English seaside towns. But not many children were raised like Switches' frontman, self-described "boy with social problems" Matt Bishop. He would point to a guitar on a T-Rex album cover and have it crafted for him by the end of the week, thanks to his dad, a music-obsessed handyman who made prop instruments for the weekly U.K. TV show *Top of the Pops*.

"I was interested in multitracking as a four-year-old," Bishop says from behind a floppy fringe in a North London pub. "I used to get two old Fisher-Price tape recorders and bounce between them, amazed at how my voice sounded doubled up." He was a full-fledged troubadour by five, writing his first song by six. "It was based on one chord," he recalls, "and it was rubbish." It wasn't until a decade later that a band materialized.

That first group, Matt Rock and the Others ("a shambling three-piece obsessed with Jon Spencer"), won a battle of the bands and the chance to open for arch-rockers the Darkness in 2003. Now the Darkness have faded to

black, and Switches—whose members also include Ollie Thomas (guitar, vocals), Thom Kirkpatrick (bass), and Steve Godfrey (drums)—have a debut album on Interscope, a gig at 2007's Glastonbury festival, and a U.S. tour with Scot rockers the Fratellis under their studded belts.

How to explain the swift rise? "It's our melodic, sexy rock," says Bishop, severely underselling the hook-laden pleasures of their debut, *Lay Down the Law*, which ranges from Franz Ferdinand-style swagger ("Lay Down the Law") to raucous glam ("Drama Queen") to steroid-loaded power pop ("Coming Down"). Lyrically, the songs jump from sex to boy-girl trouble to even ickier boy-girl trouble: Take "Stepkids in Love." "It's very soap opera," says Thomas.

Bishop defends the subject matter. "I don't want to be Bono, shaking George Bush's hand. I don't want to be Morrissey, making comments about the state of England," he says. "I just want to make good music. I'd like to be someone like Damon Albarn." Ah, still one precocious fella.

BY TIM CHESTER
PHOTOGRAPH BY REBECCA LEWIS

FAST FACTS

→ The band used to rehearse next to a brothel. "These middle-aged Asian women were selling their bodies above an electronics shop," says Bishop. "We could hear groans."

→ *Lay Down the Law* was produced by Rob Schnapf, who's worked with Beck, the Vines, and Elliott Smith.



Ollie Thomas, Steve Godfrey, Matt Bishop, and Thom Kirkpatrick, photographed for *Spin* in London, January 4, 2008



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Photographed for
Spin in London,
January 7, 2008

Laura Marling

English folkie hates crowds, loves Victorian lit

With her gently bewitching songs about bad dreams and broken hearts—not to mention her flaxen hair, snow-white skin, and searching blue eyes—teenage singer/songwriter Laura Marling is proud to come off more *Wuthering Heights* than *The Hills*. “I’ve always loved books by the Brontë sisters,” purrs Marling, who was raised in the sleepy village of Eversley. “I love Jane Austen, too. I’m more influenced by people like her than by pop culture.” But it hasn’t always been easy for this Brontë girl to fit into a Britney world. “The other students at school didn’t like my music,” says the 18-year-old. “To them, being a folksinger was like, ‘Oh, whatever.’ They’d never come across anything like it.” Then again, not everyone has a father who chooses Neil Young’s junkie blues “The Needle and the Damage Done” as the first song to teach his little girl. (“It’s a good one for basic picking,” explains Marling.) After learning the fundamentals, she began working on her own material, finding inspiration in Will Oldham’s sepia-toned Americana. “Listening to [Oldham projects] Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy

and Palace made me take music more seriously,” says Marling, who was approached by Virgin only two weeks after her first London gig. (She was 15 at the time.) Out this spring, her debut album, *Alas I Cannot Swim*, is full of literate tunes that call to mind *Byter Layter* as sung by Beth Orton’s younger sister. The “brutally honest” Marling sounds accomplished beyond her years on cuts like “New Romantic,” on which she whispers, “Maybe I should give up—and turn into my mother / God knows I love her.” Still, Marling needed her parents’ approval to relocate to the British capital, where she’s had to learn to lamp down her performance anxiety. “People think I look odd onstage,” says the shy singer, whose live appearances are a study in introverted charisma. “But the way I deal with being incredibly nervous is by concentrating really hard.” Good thing she’s learned to cope. “I don’t need to sell tons of records, but I want longevity. I want to make music for the rest of my life,” Marling says, sounding not unlike Jane Eyre.

BY DAVID MARCHESE
PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARE SHILLAND

FAST FACTS

→ Marling gets anxious backstage, too. “I couldn’t bring myself to say hello,” she says of *Devenra Bashart*, for whom she opened four dates last fall. “But then we shared a dressing room, and I had to.”

→ “You can take the girl out of Eversley, but...” live in a village-y part of London,” she says. “There are lots of trees and no one’s ever around. That’s how I like it.”

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Airbourne

AC/DC-worshipping Aussies prepare for takeoff

Talk about big balls. If Australian hard rockers Airbourne aren't the most shameless AC/DC knockoff ever, then Ranick's Tim Armstrong never owned a copy of *London Calling*, *Runnin' Wild*, Airbourne's debut, is a smorgasbord of sledgehammer riffs, crass sex puns ("I got just one wood, six holes to play"), and boozey sing-alongs with titles like "Too Much, Too Young, Too Fast" and "Cheap Wine and Cheaper Women." Frankly, it sounds like the best album Angus Young and Co. never made. (The only thing grissing is the schoolboy shorts.)

Being dubbed AC/DC Jr., however, doesn't bother 23-year-old singer/guitarist Joel O'Keefe; he's flattered. "They're one of the greatest bands in the world," he says. "It means we're doing something right."

O'Keefe grew up in Warrnambool,

Australia, where he and his brother, drummer Ryan, were decidedly out of step with their peers' musical tastes. Wholly unmoved by "hip-hop and that kind of stuff," the siblings fell in love with Aussie pub rockers such as the Angels and Rose Tattoo, whom they discovered in an uncle's vinyl stash. "It was like, 'Yeah! This stuff's awesome,'" Joel recalls. "How come there's no bands that sound like this anymore?"

The brothers responded to that question by recruiting guitarist David Roads and bassist Justin Street, and forming Airbourne in 2001, while still in their teens. Five years later, hard work, hedonism, and a helping of luck landed the band a slot opening for the Rolling Stones—and a reported \$2 million offer from Capitol Records in the U.S.

While the Capitol deal ultimately went south (Roadrunner stepped in to release

the album over here), the Melbourne-based quartet haven't wasted much time crying in their Foster's. They recently toured with Motörhead ("Absolute masters of their craft"), the sort of classic hard-rock act they feel far closer to than ostensible peers like Jet and the Vines, who, Joel reckons, are "a bit different than us."

In fact, the Airbourne boys may be guilty of reverse agelism. "Someone might say, 'Iron Maiden is old!'" says Joel. "They're not old! They're still as current as ever! They've just got a few more wrinkles." Unlied twentysomething faces aside, Airbourne aim to be every bit as venerable as their heroes. Just give 'em another year or two.

BY TOM SINCLAIR
PHOTOGRAPH BY TREVOR KING

FAST FACTS

→ Joel was inspired to become a musician at six, after seeing the Atlanta Rhythm Section perform "Boogie Smoogie" on TV.

→ What do Airbourne love most about the U.S.? The cheap booze. Says Joel: "Only \$30 for a massive bottle of Jack! Over here, that would cost a hepi!"

→ Alas, the foursome have yet to meet their idols, AC/DC.

Justin Street, Joel O'Keefe, Ryan O'Keefe, and David Roads, photographed for *Spin* in Adelaide, Australia, January 11, 2008





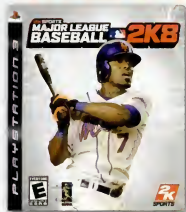
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SOUNDTRACK

COOL KIDS

Since its inception, Tom's ubiquitous MySpace friend site has spawned hopeful popstars, fledgling film makers, budding romances, and friendships, and the Cool Kids are a prime example. After meeting on MySpace.com with the intention of creating beats and loops for other artists, Chuck English and Mikey Rocks decided to try their hand at incorporating those beats into their own lyrical labyrinths, spawning a hip-hop-hooked LP *Totally Flossed Out* that caught the attention of the likes of Chocolate Industries and M.I.A., tourmates in 2007.

BRMC

Since their self-titled LP, released back in 2001, this leather-clad, three-some have strummed their way to musical stardom. Not only have Black Rebel Motorcycle Club released four rock-stomping, heart swaying albums—the latest being *Baby 81 Recordings*—they've also been packing venues for years; in 2007 alone, the trio played 178 shows in over 16 countries. From their gritty cowboy harmonies to their harmonic-backed howls, this band is sure to roll your throttle.

BATTLES

New York City musical geniuses Battles are, in a word, awesome. Whoever said mind bending-ly complicated math rock couldn't shake a stick to the mainstream is somewhere being force-fed a synthesizer right now. The frenetic foursome offer insight into a world where Brian Eno drives an ice cream truck 100 miles an hour through Williamsburg and all the kids chant: "I scream, you scream, we all scream for...Battles!"

THE CURE

Since Robert Smith's tremulous treble first rang out across the nation, heart-sore teenagers, eyeliner merchants, and melodrama soundtrack producers have had an anthem to raise their weary fists too. With 12 albums, dozens of chart-topping singles, and hundreds of musicians devotedly studying their discography in hopes of someday becoming as good as these talented, crooning Brits, the Cure have made a permanent mark on both music and fashion.

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- 3/9/2008 - Los Angeles, CA - Best Buy gaming tournament
- 3/11/2008 - Los Angeles, CA - USC / Student Quad
- 3/13/2008 - Las Vegas, NV - Univ of Las Vegas / Student Quad
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- 3/4/2008 - Tampa, FL - Univ of Tampa / Student Quad
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- 3/7/2008 - Port St. Lucie, FL - Roger Dean Stadium
- 3/8/2008 - Miami, FL - Best Buy gaming tournament
- 3/9/2008 - Tampa, FL - Best Buy gaming tournament
- 3/10/2008 - Stuart, FL - Tradition Field
- 3/12/2008 - Athens, GA - Univ of Georgia / Student Quad
- 3/15/2008 - Atlanta, GA - Best Buy gaming tournament
- 3/18/2008 - Clemson, SC - Clemson Univ / Student Quad
- 3/20/2008 - Charlotte, NC - Univ of North Carolina / The Quad

*dates subject to change. Hit 2Ksports.com for tour info.



FROM LEFT, ON CHRIS
TOMSON: MARC JACOBS
BLAZER AND SHIRT;
DIESEL SWEATER. ON EZRA
KOENIG: MARC JACOBS
BLAZER, ALEXANDER
MCQUEEN SHIRT. ON CHRIS
BAID: BEN SHERMAN
CARDIGAN, MARC JACOBS
SHIRT. ON ROSTAM
BATMANDELLA: ALEXANDER
MCQUEEN BLAZER, MARC
JACOBS SHIRT.

Styling by Ting Ting Lin.
Hair by Wesley O'Meara
at the Wall Group.

Photographed for *Spin*
in Yonkers, New York,
January 7, 2008



THE GRADUATES

THANKS TO THE NEW
SPEED OF BUZZ,
VAMPIRE WEEKEND
HAVE GONE FROM
THE IVY LEAGUE TO
THE BIG LEAGUES
IN RECORD TIME.
AND EVERYONE'S
IMPRESSED, IT
SEEMS, BUT
VAMPIRE WEEKEND.



BY ANDY GREENWALD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MATT JONES

W

WHEN EZRA KOENIG WAS A SOPHOMORE AT Columbia University, his main extracurricular activity was his (white) rap duo, L'Homme Run. They composed and performed verbally dexterous songs with titles like "Pizza Party" and "Interracial Dating" (which reflected on finding long black hairs in the shower), and co-opted the Lacoste alligator as their official mascot. The group was meant to be funny, but they weren't a joke—a subtle but key distinction that ultimately doomed the project. "It was hard for me to take seriously because no one else would take it seriously," Koenig says.

Some of that same eyebrow-raising cultural smash-and-grab is on display in Vampire Weekend, the baby-faced Koenig's suddenly successful indie band, which appropriates African and Caribbean rhythms for its gleefully polyglot pop. The memory of L'Homme Run lives on, however, at Columbia, where Koenig's one bit of underage civil disobedience remains on display: Just below a second-floor window at his old dorm, in black spray paint, is the alligator. It's a sunny, freezing late December day when Koenig points out the graffiti to me, and he's caught somewhere between sheepish pride and genuine concern that its revelation might somehow cause trouble. I tell him that the logo of a polo shirt company isn't exactly an anarchy symbol, but he just grins and keeps walking.

There would be a lot of those inscrutable smiles and uncomfortable silences during my time with Vampire Weekend, a young band rocketing to fame—or whatever passes for fame in these bifurcated, bloggy times—thanks to an explosion of online buzz and that rarest of rarities, a (self-titled) debut album that is actually worthy of the hyperbolic hosannas. Because, for a bunch of 23- and 24-year-old recent college graduates who get to play music for a living, they don't seem particularly elated by the attention. Indeed, they are, like Koenig, pitched somewhere between cocky pride and self-conscious reserve.

Over coffee in Brooklyn's Greenpoint neighborhood a few days after playing a sold-out show in Massachusetts, the band members—singer/guitarist Koenig, keyboardist Rostam Batmanglij, bassist Chris Baio, and drummer Chris Tomson—are characteristically low-key about their rapid ascent. Just two years since their fumbling first practice in a dorm room, they have self-produced an album, played to rapturous crowds on both coasts, toured Europe with



the Shins, signed a worldwide record deal, and now share management with the White Stripes and M.I.A. Yet when asked if things have been crazy—or at least exciting—Koenig, clad like his bandmates in tasteful plaid, looks back blankly. "It hasn't gotten crazy," he protests. An awkward silence.

"I think because we're not 30 and haven't had four bands and tried it before, this is just what it is," Tomson elaborates, sporting a thick scruff that

his bandmates don't look capable of replicating. "I mean, we hear that it's fast and, taking a look at other bands, maybe it is. But to us it kind of feels smooth." There are nods and murmurs from around the table. If they seem defensive, that's only because they know their unprecedented rise—Vampire Weekend are, for example, the first band ever to be shot for a *Spin* cover before they'd even released an album—inevitably makes them a target of the very

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ROSTAM BATMANGILJI,
STEVEN ALAN SHIRT AND
PANTS, MARC JACOBS
T-SHIRT AND SNEAKERS.
ON CHRIS THOMSON:
PENGUIN POLO SHIRT,
MCBURR SWEATER
(ARTIST'S OWN), BUCKLER
JEANS, CONVERSE
SNEAKERS. FOR DETAILS,
SEE WHERE TO BUY.



same machine that brought them this recognition: influential music blogs that champion unsigned, unheralded acts, only to often turn their backs once those acts become signed and heralded.

Further, their success demonstrates a radical redefinition of the very term at a time when quantifiable benchmarks are increasingly defined not by units shifted or radio airplay, but by less scientific means. "Success might mean a synch on *Friday Night*

Lights," says Alexandra Patsavas, music supervisor for *Grey's Anatomy*, *Chuck*, and *Gossip Girl*, referring to the placement of Vampire Weekend's infectious "A-Punk" on an episode of the football drama last November. "It might mean a *Letterman* performance or inclusion on a magazine's free CD. There are still gatekeepers, just many of them and smaller gates."

"Nowadays, a band doesn't even have to play shows, let alone go on a national tour, to have a 'hit

record," says Mark Willett, a founder of Music for Robots, one of the most frequently visited MP3 blogs, alongside Stereogum and Brooklyn Vegan, which regularly log downloads in the tens of thousands for every MP3 they post. (All of them jumped on the Vampire Weekend bandwagon way, way back in early 2007.) While outside proclamations are nothing new in the fiercely proprietary world of indie rock, where record labels are brands and status symbols as much as a means of distribution, the current speed of buzz and its attendant backlash can be overwhelming.

"I don't think the opinions are entirely different than what we saw in prior eras," says Matador Records copresident Gerard Cosloy, who helped shepherd the careers of Pavement and Interpol, and who published the hilariously caustic fanzine *Conflict* (a sort of Paleolithic blog—on paper!) in the '80s. "What's different is the vehicle for delivery and the unfettered access. One favorable notice on Stereogum can be instantly undermined by one or two sarcastic, pseudonymous commentators."

Indeed, parlaying this flashpoint notoriety into career longevity is the big challenge. Drooled-over

|||||

"MY WORRY ABOUT
THE WAY HYPE
WORKS NOW IS THAT
WE'RE IN DANGER
OF DISCOVERING
PEOPLE BEFORE THEY
ARE WORTHY OF
BEING DISCOVERED."

—Malcolm Gladwell

acts like Clap Your Hands Say Yeah have seen their fortunes falter when follow-up albums failed to deliver on the breathless promise (CYHSY's *Some Loud Thunder* sold 100,000 fewer copies than their debut) or the ficke blogosphere simply moved on. "Tapes 'n Tapes played no fewer than nine shows at South by Southwest in 2006," says Willett, referring to the annual Austin, Texas music festival. "Then their record came out, and people stopped caring." The travails of more recent blog bands suggest an ever-widening disconnect between the wishful hyping of fans and the reality of youth. Despite reams of breathless praise online for Florida-based Black Kids' scrappy pop, for example, nothing can change the fact that they only have a four-song EP completed. Nothing, that is, except the one thing bloggers have no sympathy for: time.

"All creative activity requires at least some time to mature," says cultural critic Malcolm Gladwell, whose book *Blink* examines instinct and split-second decision-making. "And one of the inadvertently useful aspects of the pre-Internet, pre-accelerated-

hype era is that it allowed artists some enforced period of obscurity to develop their art. My biggest worry about the way hype works now is that we're in danger of discovering people before they are worthy of being discovered."

But this is not a worry that keeps the guys of Vampire Weekend at night. They seem either unafraid of failure or absolutely certain of their own success. "Forget money," says Koenig. "People can make money however. Get a second job or tour."

And if a backlash were to kick in? "In some ways I'd love that," says Batmangliji, "because then we could just make our next album more quickly."



VAMPIRE WEEKEND—NAMED AFTER a comic horror movie set in Cape Cod that Koenig and friends made a few summers back (the trailer is on YouTube)—is a New York City band but free from the skinny-trousered baggage that label usually entails.

The group formed not in artsy Brooklyn, but rather at prestigious Columbia University, on Manhattan's genteel Upper West Side, where their idiosyncratic influences and decidedly unpunk technical chops were free to develop undisturbed and unmocked. And, despite all the preppy clothes and passport-friendly style sourcing, the resulting songs are effortlessly infectious, imbued with a sense of whimsical, dancery abandon that's missing from most "college" bands, not just ones featuring former music majors. "That's the great thing about them," says Rich McLaughlin, format manager for Sirius Satellite Radio. "They appeal to a lot of different audiences: indie, mainstream alternative, even jam-band fans."

"Being a New York band but living where they did meant they were free to come into their own," says Kris Chen, the A&R rep who signed the band to XL Recordings in the U.S. "That's why I fell for them immediately. They didn't give a shit about being cool. We all know that's the ultimate in being cool."

Koenig, an English major, remembers encountering Batmangliji at a party in the fall of 2002, their freshman year, and instantly wanting to join forces. Though their interests were disparate (Batmangliji listed as his then-favorite bands "Goldplay, Radiohead, and Sigur Rós—in that order," and Koenig, whose tastes leaned toward folk and hip-hop, recalls thinking that Batmangliji had the order wrong), they shared a passion for exploration and performance. Tomson, a genial recovering Phish



Better than Ezra: Koenig with Andrew Kaladjian in L'Homme Run, 2004; Dan Millar, Andrei Padlowski, Koenig, and Wes Miles of Sophisticuffs, 2000

phan, met Batmangliji in harmony and composition classes and eventually served as L'Homme Run's hype man. A year later the trio met Baio—who was one year younger but able to play Metallica riffs from memory—and thus a gang was born.

Midway through his senior year, Koenig became obsessed with a compilation of pop from Madagascar at the same time that Batmangliji returned from a trip to England with a worn cassette by Brenda Fassie, the late South African singer known as "the Madonna of the townships." Doubly inspired, the two, with Baio and Tomson on board, began planning what would become Vampire Weekend. "The name and some of the ideas were talked about by a while," says Baio. "It took actually booking a show to start practic-

ing." Indeed, long before their first concert, the group produced a "band manifesto" that either doesn't actually exist (according to Batmangliji) or, to hear Koenig tell it, lurks on his laptop, written out in a font stolen from *Tintin* comic books. Ranging from a policy of no T-shirts onstage (Koenig prefers cable-knit sweaters and boat shoes) to a canonical appreciation for Johnny Marr's clean, almost African guitar riff on the Smiths' "This Charming Man," the manifesto lays out the group's core conceits, and whether it physically exists or not, suggests that this is a band highly conscious of its own mythmaking. They care deeply about appearing not to care, which, country-club trappings aside, is about as old-school rock-star as it gets.

Vampire Weekend's first gig was a battle of the bands thrown by some engineering students in February 2006. They played future album standouts "Oxford Comma" and "Walcott" in slightly different forms, and the reaction from friends was positive. Still, they finished third out of four. "The judges did an *American Idol* postperformance critique," remembers Koenig. "So we had to stand there and listen to these guys say, 'Hey, you're pretty good, but I don't really like hipsters!' Which was funny—even at the first show I thought we were dressed very unhipster." Subsequent shows were played at a frat house—cum-literary society on Riverside Drive, a photo of which graces the cover of *Vampire Weekend*.

Even though they were all still students, the members of Vampire Weekend quickly adopted a professional tone. "I just felt it was important to have ten songs recorded," says Batmangliji, "even when we only had four written." In short, they were doing the same sort of high-work, low-reward business that bands have pluggd away for decades. But thanks to the Internet, Pro Tools software, and Batmangliji's MacBook, rewards could come more quickly. Gradually, the band recorded the songs that would eventually wind up on *Vampire Weekend*—a friend's violin captured in a dorm room here, drum work in a campus studio there. Batmangliji burned the results onto bright blue CD-Rs that were sold at early shows and distributed to key tastemakers like Stereogram's Amir Singh. "It was pretty aggressive," Koenig admits.

Interestingly, none of the CD-Rs were ever sent to

TWO YEARS, ONE WEEKEND

The epic, action-packed timeline of a band's ascent

BY ANDY GREENWALD

FEBRUARY 2004

Vampire Weekend play first gig at Columbia University battle of the bands, finishing third out of four. [Congrats to winners Lion in the Grass!]

MARCH 2004

First Vampire Weekend MP3, "Walcott (Insane Mix)," debuts on the band's new website.

SEPTEMBER 2004

"White EP" containing most of what will eventually be on *Vampire Weekend* is given to friends and sold at second Mercury Lounge show; garners band's first mention on Music for Robots and Good Weather for Airstrikes.

FEBRUARY 2007

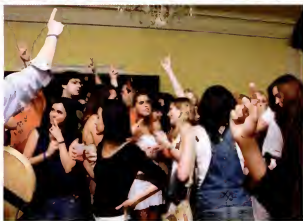
CD-R featuring most of what will eventually be on *Vampire Weekend* is given to friends and sold at second Mercury Lounge show; garners band's first mention on Music for Robots and Good Weather for Airstrikes.

JUNE 2007

After attending a gig at a Brooklyn art gallery, Kelefa Sanneh writes in the *New York Times* that "even without an album, Vampire Weekend has made one of the year's most impressive debuts."

JULY 2007

VW signs with XL Recordings, begins first national tour in Washington, D.C.



Rockin' the coeds at Columbia's Alpha Delta Phi house in February 2007 (top left) and the literary society, April 2006

actual record labels. "That seemed ultimately fruitless," says Koenig. "These people don't want to listen to some random thing they don't have any context for." (When I ask Batmanglij if they at least partook of some fancy meals from major-label reps, he responds with a yawn. He actually *yawns*.) Instead, the band worked the newly developed middle—an incestuous network of fans, bloggers, and music-biz outsiders who seemingly can disseminate world-changing hype at the touch of their iPhones—and created their own context. Derek Davies, the blogger behind Good Weather for Airstrikes, saw Vampire Weekend at a Columbia show in February 2007

and copped a CD-R. One month later U.K.-based XL A&R rep Imran Ahmed and music-industry attorney Nicky Stein each independently e-mailed Davies asking to pick his brain when they were in New York on their way to South by Southwest. At both meetings, Davies talked up Vampire Weekend. "Then, after South by Southwest, both sent me e-mails calling Vampire Weekend the best new band they'd heard all year," says Davies. "And the rest is pretty much history." The gamble paid off: So-called "old media"—labels, MTV, *The New York Times*, even national magazines—were quickly forced to respond to the buzz.

"There was kind of a tipping point in April of 2007," says Tomson, invoking a Malcolm Gladwell buzz phrase. "Suddenly, at our shows there'd be more nonfriends than friends." Just two months later, Koenig decided to forgo his nascent teaching career and instead concentrate on the band full time. "By June it was incredibly obvious that we really needed to go on tour and play our music for more people," he says. At each stop on that national tour they were greeted by fans who knew the songs from the blogs. By the time they returned to New York in August—with Batmanglij behind the wheel, blasting the Killers triumphantly on the George Washington Bridge—they had landed themselves a record deal, a booking agent, and a manager.

As for the perception that Vampire Weekend, who like to toy with a children-of-privilege image, haven't worked hard for their success, XL's Chen disagrees vehemently. "They've done more than what a lot of bands do a couple of years into their careers," says Chen. "Three tours driving around the country with no tour manager, pooling their money to buy a minivan—they made these decisions because from the gut they knew it was the right thing to do. Some people will stress over whether Vampire Weekend have 'paid their dues'—all it takes is a little Googling to see that they have."

ESTHER S. WHITE (4)

AUGUST 2007

VW sign with Ian Montano, manager of The White Stripes, the Shins, and M.I.A.

SEPTEMBER 2007

VW featured in *The New Yorker*; sell out first New York City headlining gig Good Weather for Airstrikes calls Black Kids "the best new American band since Vampire Weekend"

NOVEMBER 2007

VW open five European tour dates for the Shins; get full-page profile in *Spin*; "A-Punk" appears on Friday Night Lights.

JANUARY 2008

XL releases Vampire Weekend; band play two sold-out headlining shows at Manhattan's 575-capacity Bowers Ballroom.

MARCH 2008

Band appears on cover of *Spin*; international success secured



THE DAY AFTER COFFEE IN GREEN-point, I met Koenig at the Hungarian Pastry Shop, a student-friendly bakery blocks from Columbia's main quad. After a year living and teaching middle-school English in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, he has moved back to the neighborhood to be with his girlfriend while she finishes her senior year. Though he is likely to be carded well into the next decade, Koenig is cerebral and preternaturally self-assured. He seems to possess encyclopedic knowledge of every major era of pop music—our conversation hopscoches from '70s Brit-folk to mid-'90s hip-hop—but he speaks in a clinical, removed way, as if it were all a glorious steam table that had been laid out specifically for him to feast upon.

Growing up in suburban New Jersey, Koenig played guitar and saxophone, starred in musicals, and had bands ranging from surf (the Aquatones) to funk (Groove Prophecy) to indie (Sophisticuffs). "He'd always be into something different than the week before," remembers Wes Miles, singer for Ra Ra Riot and Koenig's longtime friend. "African music, folk, hip-hop—I don't think his curiosity was ever satisfied."

"By the time I was in high school, I had no genre allegiance at all," Koenig says. "I think sometimes people get caught up in the need to feel that by listening to indie rock, they're separating themselves from something," he says. "But it was the white kids flipping out to Nelly at the school dance. It wasn't anything to be diametrically opposed to. Whereas, maybe if you went to high school in the late '70s and the kids were listening to Toto or something, you'd really feel a tension."

While at Columbia, Koenig immersed himself in postcolonial literary theory and even started a blog of his own (Internetvibes.blogspot.com) documenting his investigations into the overarching ideology that fuels Vampire Weekend's free-wheeling cultural sampling. "It's like zeitgeist or gestalt," he explains brightly, "a whole that's greater than the sum of its parts." So his lyrics can reference both posh New England towns and Lil Jon, all from a musical sensibility that insists "the vibe from hearing interlocking African music is the same vibe you get from a baroque Vivaldi."

Koenig claims the right to cherry-pick across lines of culture, race, genre, and class because, as the descendant of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, he is himself an outsider of sorts. And having wrestled with issues of authenticity and cultural appropriation as a deracinated fourth-generation Ivy Leaguer, he's concluded that he's allowed to do whatever he hell he wants. It's charming, but it's also indicative of the sort of confidence that only exists in the very young, the very successful, or both. Because he cannot imagine any resistance or skepticism to what he's doing, none seems to exist. At least not yet. "From thinking about it so much, you naturally know where the boundaries are," he insists. "Every once in a while, we've seen some things where people try to bring colonialism or appropriation into [talking about our band] in a negative way—but that debate has already happened. We're in a context that's coming after instances of people actually stealing from each other."

Opening for the
Shins in Paris,
November 2007



"I THINK PEOPLE
HAVE THIS NEED
TO FEEL THAT BY
LISTENING TO INDIE
ROCK, THEY'RE
SEPARATING
THEMSELVES FROM
SOMETHING."

—Ezra Koenig

ROSTAM BATMANGLIJ, THE CHILD of actual immigrants (his mother is Najmieh Batmanglij, a cookbook author and leading authority on Persian cuisine), has a similar attitude. Growing up in Washington, D.C., he saw music not as an escape route or as

a higher calling, but rather as a problem to be solved. "I got really interested in theory," he says, "in melodies and harmonies, and I just wanted to crack it."

He's also the man who defined crunk—literally. "I interned at the *Oxford English Dictionary* a few summers ago," he says. "We each got to pick three new words to define, and I got *crunk*." This seems highly

appropriate for a former flautist who is technical enough to scribble string arrangements in his spare time but also enough of a dreamer to believe that Discovery, his R&B side project with Ra Ra Riot's Miles, will unseat Usher from the hip-hop charts.

He and I are sitting in the bedroom of his shared apartment in tony Brooklyn Heights. The room is spartan, with most of the space dominated by very serious equipment: multiple Macs, a microphone, keyboards, an electric guitar. The shelf above the bed is filled with various pedals and fancy-looking effects boxes. Batmanglij is friendly but reticent. Questions are often met with stony silence or one-word replies. He requests that a discussion about his love for Wes Anderson be kept off the record. After a long conversation about how a passion for postmodernism and his hero, painter Jean-Michel Basquiat, infiltrated the planning of Vampire Weekend, Batmanglij suddenly pauses and announces that he eventually realized he "hadn't had a single real thought about postmodernism in four years."

A cynic could argue that it's Vampire Weekend's inflated profile mixed with their youthful precociousness that allows them to indulge in such intellectual conceits. But that seems

shortsighted. The battles over authenticity, over appropriation, are ancient history to these guys. They are playing the hand they've been dealt, and their fast success is proof that they're playing it expertly.

It's hard to credit the rise of MP3s with a revolution when they are in the midst of dramatic change themselves. While smaller blogs fight for exclusives, the heavyweights have begun sounding more and more like the old guard they seek to usurp. Listen to Stereogum's Amrit Singh on Vampire Weekend's long-term prognosis: "With the ball rolling and growing support overseas, there's an opportunity to make some money on the distribution and larger-scale touring."

In fact, when seen through this prism, Vampire Weekend seem like the steadiest yacht in a bumpy sea. They've recorded their own album, booked their own tours, designed their own artwork. They can play well-attended shows at home and abroad, and they own their master recordings. Their DIY aesthetic is punk, even if nothing else about them is. And though he may be reluctant to read too much into what all this hubbub portends for his band, Koenig is too thoughtful and studious to resist contextualizing it. "It's not because of a lack of technology that those Black Flag-type bands had the lifestyle that they did. There was still a-ha blowing up off of one single, people getting excited and then forgetting about them."

His eyes twinkle for a moment.

"And who's to say we're not more like a-ha anyway?" ☺



MORE AT SPIN.COM For exclusive video from our cover shoot, go to spin.com/vampireweekend

Ever tried sliding
down a
bobsled run naked?



Ever tried  Gum?
Stimulate Your Senses

There's a new hip-hop/dance hybrid blowing up in the windy city. With a sense of unbridled fun not seen since rap's golden age, this new crew cherry-picks from two decades of club music, creating a gangsta-free, party-igniting sound that's made for inciting dance-floor riots. Here, the most promising new jacks—**Flosstradamus, the Cool Kids, Dude 'N Nem, and Kid Sister**—throw a kickass house party, while spotlighting spring fashion that's as vibrant as their music.

CHICAGO,


ILL!

BY JESSICA HOPPER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIKO LIM

STYLING BY TING TING LIN





Kid Sister, photographed
for *Spin* in Chicago,
December 17, 2007



FLOSSTRADAMUS

Every hip kid in the Second City has shivered in the line that forms outside the monthly gigs by this DJ duo. Inside, the crowd goes apeshit to the mix of ringtone rap, old-school rave, regional Chi-Town tracks, and indie-rock remixes. "We want to do something that isn't stuck-up and lets people get loose," says 26-year-old Curt Cameruci (a.k.a. Autobot), partner of 24-year-old Josh Young (a.k.a. J2K), who is also Kid Sister's younger brother. "We aren't doing anything special." Wethinks the DJ doth protest too much.



FROM LEFT, ON AUTOBOT:
A.P.C. SHIRT AND PANTS,
ROMARIO MANZONI TIE,
KANGOL HAT, Y'S BRYDOLLA
YAMAMOTO SUSPENDERS,
VESTAL WATCH, THOM
BROWNE SHOES.
ON J2K: BEN SHERMAN
SWEATER AND PANTS,
THOM BROWNE SHIRT
AND SHOES, Y'S BY
YOHJI YAMAMOTO
SUSPENDERS, GWENTH
HAT, NODIN WATCH.



"WE'RE MIDWESTERN
NICE, AND IT'S BEEN TO
OUR ADVANTAGE."

— J2K

"HALF THE YEAR
IS COLD AS HELL.
COLD MAKES
YOU GRIND.
IT'S GOOD FOR
YOUR THINKING
PROCESS.
YOU AREN'T
DISTRACTED BY
THE BEACH."

—MIKEY ROCKS





FROM LEFT, ON MIKEY
ROCKS, BUCKLER JEANS
AND BELT; NEW JEANS
ON CHUCK INGLISH; STUSSY
JEANS, BUCKLER BELT

THE COOL KIDS

In just six months, Mikey Rocks, 20, and Chuck Inglish, 23, went from Internet fame—check the heavily blogged track “Black Mags”—to something more tangible. With nothing more than a MySpace page, the pair scored a Rhapsody commercial, an opening slot on M.I.A.’s tour, and a cameo on Lil Wayne’s “Getting It.” Their slow-rolling sound updates vintage Beastie Boys and EPMD with trunk-crumpling beats more minimal than a Mark Rothko painting. Their debut EP, *The Bake Sale* (Chocolate Industries), is out this month.



"YOU
AREN'T
EVER
GONNA
READ
ABOUT ME
HAVING TWO
BABIES
IN TWO
YEARS AND
CUTTING
ALL MY
HAIR OFF."

— KID SISTER



KID SISTER

Melisa Young began writing rhymes at the encouragement of her brother, J2K of Flosstradamus, who produced her first few tracks. "We joke that we're the hip-hop Olsen twins," she says. With a speedy flow and an adorable Midwestern drawl, she soon caught the ear of tastemakers like A-Trak, who happens to be Kanye West's tour DJ. Not long after, Kanye and the 27-year-old were rapping—West dropped a cameo on her beautician-and-the-beat single "Pro Nails"—and touring Australia together. Kids grow up so fast these days....



OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP, FROM LEFT, ON MIKEY ROCKS: PEBBLE SWEATER, KISLBI JEANS. ON CHUCK INGLESM: STUSSY JEANS, NEW YORK HAT COMPANY HAT. ON J2K: AMERICAN APPAREL, CARDIGAN AND CORDEL BROW PRINTS, BEN SHERMAN T-SHIRT, NOON WATCH, BROTON HAT. ON AUTOTOT: FREEDY SHIRT, SWEATER, BEN SHERMAN SHIRT, PUMA/VEISU JEANS, BROTON HAT. ON KID SISTER: CANON, UNAVAILABLE DRESS. ON MC UMPOST: SHORTY CAPONE SHIRT AND SUNGLASSES, L-R-B JEANS, NEW LRA HAT, REEBOK SNEAKERS. ON MC TRYNO: SHORTY CAPONE SHIRT AND SUNGLASSES, L-R-B JEANS, VESTAL WATCH.

THIS PAGE, ON KID SISTER: PRINT DRESS, DAVID AND GOLIATH SHOES.

"CHICAGO
PEOPLE GONNA
BE REAL WITH
YOU. THEY
AIN'T GONNA
BE PHONY."

—MC UPMOST

FROM LEFT, ON MC TRYGIC:
SHORTY CAPONE SHIRT
AND SUNGLASSES, L-R-G
JEANS, VESTAL WATCH,
CREATIVE RECREATION
SNEAKERS. ON MC
UPMOST: SHORTY CAPONE
SHIRT AND SUNGLASSES,
L-R-G JEANS, NEW ERA
HAT, REEBOK SNEAKERS.
FOR DETAILS, SEE
WHERE TO BUY.

"IN CHICAGO,
PEOPLE EITHER
HATE YOU OR
LOVE YOU. NO
IN-BETWEEN."

—MC TRYGIC



DUDE 'N NEM

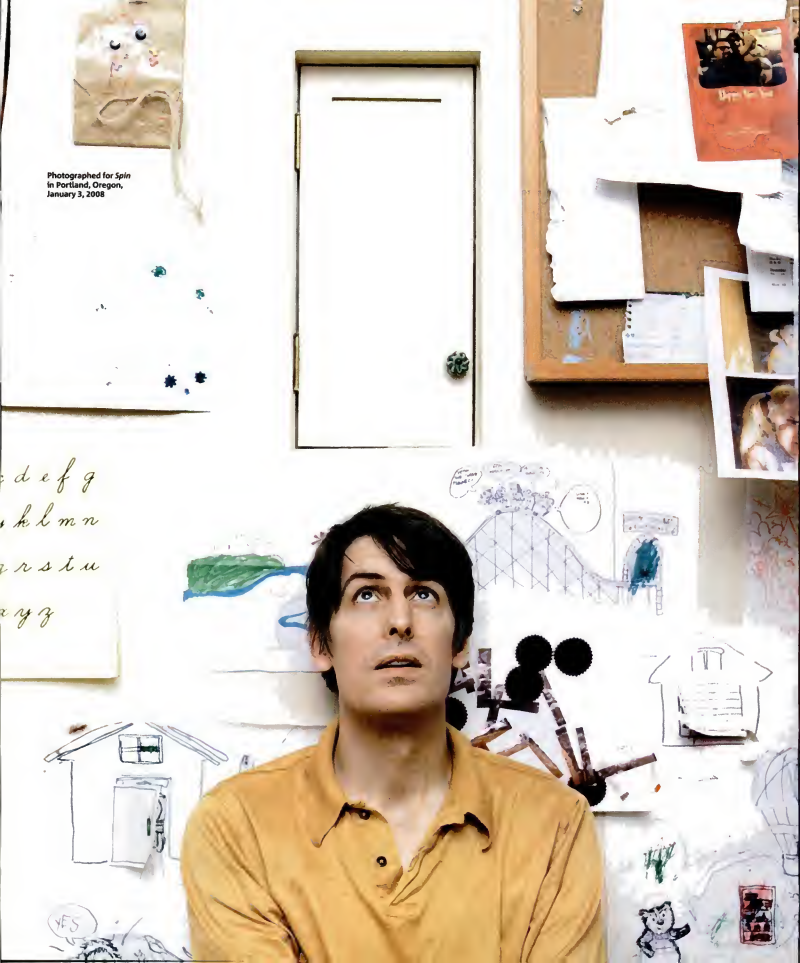
With the epileptic funk of "Watch My Feet," MC Trygic, 24, and MC Upmost, 25, brought the hyper hip-house style known as juke to a worldwide audience—proof is only a few YouTube clicks away. Until their full-length, *Tinted Incubators*, arrives this summer, entertain yourself with the addictive trifles on their MySpace page: a juke-style remix of Plain White T's wussy-emo smash "Hey There Delilah" and a warbly slow jam about first dates under the golden arches ("McDonald's"). Could a Pizzeria Uno anthem be far behind?

Makeup by Susie Lee
for Ford Artists. Hair
by Anna Lee Jackson.
Production by Jon Slinger.

Special thanks to Alex
Gwojic. Hotel provided
by the James Chicago.

Photographed for Spin
in Portland, Oregon,
January 3, 2008

e d e f g
h i j k l m n
o p q r s t u
v w x y z



Over the course of two decades, **Stephen Malkmus** has traded Pavement's inscrutable, self-reflexive wordplay for marathon prog-guitar solos. "I'm just not that much into words lately," he says. Yet he speaks to us anyway.

BY DOUGLAS WOLK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN CLARK

For most of the '90s, Stephen Malkmus may have been the perpetually smirking face of indie rock. Pavement, the quintet he formed in his hometown of Stockton, California, with fellow singer/guitarist Scott Kannberg, became the figureheads of a scene, as passionate about elegantly formed pop songs as they were about noise, chaos, and diffidence. When they broke up in 1999, Malkmus stepped back from the spotlight a bit—"It seems like someone else's world now," he says of the band's glory days—and formed the Jicks. (With a lineup that includes bassist Joanna Bolme, keyboardist/guitarist Mike Clark, and former Sleater-Kinney drummer Janet Weiss, his fourth post-Pavement album, *Real Emotional Trash*, is out now.) On a rainy afternoon in

the toy-strewn Portland, Oregon house he shares with his wife, Jessica Hutchins, and their daughters, two-year-old Lottie and seven-week-old Sunday, the formerly itinerant Malkmus, now 41, looks back on his 20-year career, *careeah*, Korea, Korea....

What was it like growing up in Stockton in the '70s and '80s?

Well, it was the time of John Hughes movies and skateboard culture. It was a much more Los Angeles-influenced place than San Francisco—kids would wear Quiksilver surfer shorts and ride skateboards. It was hot and flat. My parents moved there because they wanted to raise a family, and in Los Angeles in the '70s, there was a gas crisis and the Watts riots and Manson—

not that that really affected them much, but they were just a middle-class family who wanted space for their kids to ride bikes over to another kid's house.

Were you one of the skaters?

Yeah. We had a place called Inland Surf; I went there. But I wasn't finding abandoned pools. There was a half-pipe my friends had. I was a little scared, because there was an early episode in Sacramento. It was a birthday party, this guy wiped out, and his braces went up into his mouth. He was bleeding down his face, and I was like, *Man! I don't really have the body type*. I guess Tony Hawk is tall and thin, but it seemed like the littler, lower-center-of-gravity guys were having more success on skateboards.

When did you start buying records and getting into punk?

I guess a little bit in high school. Devo were the sort of gateway band that broke into punk for me. Dead Kennedys were the band that came to Stockton first. They had a lot of appeal to a teenager: very sarcastic and infantile, but also there was some social commentary, and their records were really great. That was when I started playing guitar. I had a soft-string Spanish guitar or something. I had some lessons, but

to be into the Fall." The early Pavement wasn't, "We're gonna start this way. First we'll release this, then we'll get picked up by a bigger label and get signed." It was more like, "Well, we'll just record this one document, and it can be found ten years later or something." That kind of discovery is what's fun about music.

From the outset, Pavement were unique in that you were openly upper-middle-class—you had nice sweaters, good haircuts, you were probably the first band to use the word *docent* in lyrics...

Well, we went to college—we weren't going to hide it. Mudhoney were deliberately anti-intellectual; Sonic Youth hid it in art damage.

Back in 1994, you had a brush with fame with "Cut Your Hair," a song that seemed to be about careerism.

Yeah, and it's too bad it wasn't quite the song that could've really pushed the band. For all the mistakes that were made marketing Pavement, it comes down to the song; and the song was pretty good, but it just wasn't the song of the time. The offspring song ("Come Out and Play"), "Cannonball" by the Breeders—those were bigger songs people could get behind. Being in a band at that time in New York, looking through the *Village Voice* with a gazillion bands playing

to it for whatever reason—the song does rule, even if marketing and timing and luck and stuff are important.

Are you still in touch with the other members of Pavement?

Well, Scott's up in Seattle—I saw him recently. Bob [Nasranchovich] is in my fantasy basketball league, so I see him online. Whenever I get to New York, I always see Mark [Ibald]. And the drummer [Steve West] is sort of lost in childvill in the middle of Virginia—he's a little AWOL, but he's still my friend. We still all get on, but it's hard to imagine that band being a living entity again. If we ever got back together again, I'd like it to be later, when we're really paunchy and our fans are cashing in their IRAs.

You're one of the few major bands from that era that hasn't reunited.

I'll go see reunion bands; I have no problem with that. My Bloody Valentine? I'd like to see them. Van Halen and the Police—I like both bands, but I probably wouldn't want to spend two hours at a mega-arena.

When did you start to believe you could make a long-term career out of playing?

Pavement was just kind of a simulated band—we didn't play shows, really—it was just for our entertainment. When *Slanted* and *Enchanted* got a lot of press, we did a real tour with real venues, and then thought, "Yeah, we can treat this like a real thing." There's an indie touring industry that was growing up at that time—new clubs in urban centers, bigger guarantees for the bands. People who want to live off their bands today have to tour, because the record sales aren't that great, unfortunately, and you can't rely on a car commercial—you probably can't get one or two in your life. But now, my new band with Janet and Joanna is a live thing, and it's probably better live than it is on record, in a way. The records aren't as bad as Grateful Dead records, but we've become a more-in-the-moment thing as we're getting older. When you're younger, you really want to have your documents, you want to make your statement. And now the live thing is the moment and the moments are going away soon, so you want those.

With the Jicks, you've started playing in much more of a guitar-hero way.

I probably feel like, with my limited vocal range and limited topics that I'm even interested in singing about, it's logical that I'd rather just get to the instrumental part. I like singing and I like melodies and stuff, and in concert I like to let

"It's too bad 'Cut Your Hair' wasn't the song that pushed the band. It was good, it just wasn't the song of the time."

then I played bass in a Stockton band called Straw Dogs. They had already been performing—they were called the Young Pioneers, and they were kind of the older generation of guys who were into the Damned and Johnny Thunders. They seemed old then, but they were 19 or 20. Back then, you sort of wanted to have a little gimmick, so the Young Pioneers were communists. But the Straw Dogs weren't—we were more melodic. And we had some thrash songs, but no dogma, really, other than that our singer had a mohawk.

By the time you started recording, there wasn't really any of that California punk sound in what you were doing.

Yeah, I went away to college. Your tastes change—you go to school and people are like, "You like this?" You gotta hear this," you know?

The first couple of Pavement records seemed mysterious: "Who is this S.M.? Who's this Spiral Stairs?"

That was kind of taken from Swell Maps and Chrome, and the hipper edge of college radio, where some big brother was saying, "You need

every night, or knowing that the CMJ music conference was coming, it was about Pavement being bemused by—or afraid of—committing to wanting that.

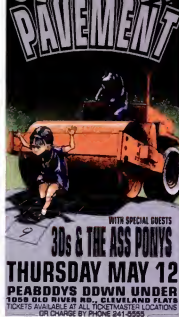
Are you less ambivalent now about how your legacy is perceived?

I'm very lucky on that front. I'm basically proud of what we did and what we're doing, and that people are into it still. I don't know what more I could've expected from the humble beginnings—not that we weren't confident that what we were doing was good, but that it could have that much of an impact that we could tour around and meet a lot of cool people and not have a regular job. Good bands and people have generally come out of the time that we came from—it's gone on longer than probably anyone thought it could.

Do you think that if Pavement were a bunch of 22- or 24-year-olds starting a band now, you'd be hit by blogger backlash?

I don't think so. If you click with people, it will ride through. The proof is in the pudding. I mean, people do still like music. They connect

Clockwise from top left: Pavement's Malkmus, Steve West, Mark Ibold, Bob Nasranchovich, and Scott Carnberg in 1995; a gig poster from 1998; with Jicks Mike Clark, Janet Weiss, and Joanna Bolme in 2008; with Lottie, 2008; Pavement's end days in Atlanta, 1999; and early days in New Jersey, 1992



it go and feel the singing, but in practice you don't really want to do that over and over again. With guitar, there's always something to discover.

Do you write any poetry or words that don't go with music?

Not really. I wish I did. I'm the kind of person who sees something or thinks of something and wishes they had something to write it down with, and then forgets. But that could be a problem of having a child; I did more of that when I was younger. It gets to the point where there's so much that's been said. I'm just not that much into words lately.

There's a theme of domesticity in your lyrics, all the way back to the early records, where you sing about parents and sons. Now titles like "Elmo Delmo" and "Wicked Wanda" sound like they could be for children's songs. Have you always wanted to settle down and have a family?

I don't think so. Maybe subconsciously, but I didn't see myself as a family man. That stuff just comes fast as you get older. If you get in a serious relationship, you decide to do it, or decide "We don't wanna have kids. Let's travel the world." But for me, it was part of getting serious.

How does being a parent now affect the kind of music you make?

I guess it's less likely I'd make a really dirty song, but maybe I wouldn't do that anyway. There's less time, more focused, concentrated time. You can't just pick up the guitar for a couple of hours and think, "Hey, that's good. I'll remember that." For other people who are very organized, it's probably fine.

"If Pavement got back together, I'd like it to be later, when we're really paunchy and our fans are cashing in their IRAs."

What is your day-to-day life like when you're not recording or touring?

I spend a lot of time here, just looking after the kids. It's pretty domestic, basically. I play darts once a week at the Triple Nickel. Pavement doesn't have a manager, so there's business stuff—I did a Hyundai ad in Korea, so you have to talk to people, send invoices...

You sang Bob Dylan songs with the Crust Brothers [his occasional live collaboration with Silkworth] and on the soundtrack to *I'm Not There*. When did you first get into Dylan?

I was never much of a fan of his, to be honest. If you listen to early Velvet Underground, in a way they're very similar. Lou Reed was a huge fan of Bob Dylan—"Run Run Run" sounds just like this other song, the one with the "eereooooo!" ["Highway 61 Revisited"]. Plus, I saw him with the Dead in the '80s, and he was really boring. But, all that being said, I always respected his word ability and groundbreaking early-'60s moves—I can only imagine what it was like to be there for that. It's fun to sing his songs. He's a fellow Gemini, not that that matters to me. But I can relate to his attitude. It's kind of punk.

Toward the end of Pavement, you and Nastanovich were investing in racehorses. Are you still involved with that?

No, that was just a one-off thing. You kind of have to get into it from when you're young—you can't just start when you're in your 30s. My friend Ned is amazing at judging basketball talent; he'd be a great scout for the Blazers, but they don't let you tap into businesses halfway through. You have to pay your dues even if you're better than the person who did pay their dues. It's kind of a drag.

If you could emulate anyone's career, whose would it be?

Well, when you feel like sort of a lifer in music, of course there's Sonic Youth. And Mark E. Smith (of the Fall), but that's a tough model; that probably takes a dark, dark heart. I haven't thought about transitioning into anything else in my life. I mean, I don't know how to do anything else.

Courtney Love once called you the Grace Kelly of rock. What does that even mean?

I'd take it as a compliment, because Grace Kelly is very graceful and cool. So as far as I'm concerned, that's far better than being the—what's his name who played Buddy Holly?—the Gary Bussey of rock. It means you're kind of classy a little bit, right? ☺

SPIN MORE AT SPIN.COM Look back at Malkmus in Spin through the years at spin.com/stephenmalkmus

DISCOGRAPHY Stephen Malkmus

FROM LO-FI WUNDERKIND TO PROG-ROCK TORCHBEARER IN SIX EASY STEPS



PAVEMENT
Slanted and Enchanted ★★★★★
MATADOR, 1992

Pavement's debut album, recorded as a trio with original drummer Gary Young, twisted together the whole history of the rock underground and remodeled its DIY dissonance into a vehicle for smart, crafty pop songs. Now expanded to a double CD, including the glorious *Watusi*, *Domestic EP*.



PAVEMENT
Westing (By Musket and Sextant) ★★★★★
DRAG CITY, 1993

A compilation of the insanely inventive EPs that preceded *Slanted* and set the tone for the indie rock of the '90s—fully formed songs alongside amorphous sound-squiggles, recorded on the cheap and wrapping chewy tunefulness in bristling noise.



PAVEMENT
Wowee Zowee ★★★★★
MATADOR, 1995

Their third and most stylistically all-over-the-place album incorporates frantic punk rock, chilled-out country, daffy fake Bowie, single-minded drone jams, and a handful of anthems—about "this generation" and growing beyond it—that resolutely refuse to take a stand.



SILVER JEWS
American Water ★★★★★
DRAG CITY, 1998

Malkmus was part of Virginia poet David Berman's cracked country-rock band Silver Jews, and he's played guitar on their records on and off since 1992. Turns out he's a great sideman, and this third album features some of Berman's most charmingly peculiar songs.



STEPHEN MALKMUS
Stephen Malkmus ★★★★★
MATADOR, 2001

His solo debut—backed up by Portland, Oregon pals he christened the Jicks—isn't far off from latter-day Pavement. Still, it's more whimsical, with subjects that include pirates, poets, Yul Brynner, and a girl with an older hippie boyfriend and "swful toe rings."



STEPHEN MALKMUS
Face the Truth ★★★★★
MATADOR, 2005

Mostly recorded at home and by himself, Malkmus' third solo album doesn't aim too high, but he sounds like he's having a blast playing around with so-uncool-they're-cool keyboard sounds and tossing off an eight-minute guitar freak-out. *D.W.*


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PARAMORE

FROM LEFT, ON JEREMY DAVIS: STOCK CARDIGAN, A.P.C. SHIRT, SIXTY PANTS, RICKLEBEE TIE. ON JOSH FARRO: H&M BLAZER, DISTILL LEE SHIRT, 6-STAR JEANS, OODSIE TIE. ON HAYLEY WILLIAMS: 3.1 PHILIP LIM BLAZER, AMERICAN EAGLE OUTFITTERS TANK, MIU MIU SKIRT, KSHEN BRACELET. ON ZAC FARRO: J. LINDBERGH JACKET, YONK DEVEREAUX SHIRT AND VEST, SIXTY PANTS.

Photographed for Spin in Nashville, January 12, 2008.

IS

A full-page photograph of Hayley Williams and Chris Carrabba of the band Fall Out Boy. Hayley is in the foreground, smiling, with her signature red hair. Chris is behind her, also smiling. The background is a bright, outdoor setting, possibly a beach or boardwalk.

BAND

A

SHE'S THE FLAME-HAIRED
FRONTWOMAN FOR ROCK'S
MOST SUCCESSFUL NEW ACT.
BUT HAYLEY WILLIAMS JUST
WANTS TO BE ONE
OF THE GUYS.

BY NICOLE KEIPER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY VIKI FORSHEE / STYLING BY KUSUM LYNN

rankin, Tennessee—30 minutes south of Nashville—is one of the wealthiest towns in one of the nation's wealthiest counties. Brad Paisley, Carrie Underwood, Miley Cyrus, and Sheryl Crow live around here. So does half of the contemporary Christian-music industry. It only follows, then, that the Starbucks on Main Street is a haven for power meetings, and right now, the brain trust behind local-kids-done-good Paramore face a minor crisis as they discuss new merch with their manager. Josh Farro, the pop-punk quartet's 20-year-old guitarist, wears a look of concern and resignation.

"I asked for it extra hot," he says, shrugging apologetically as he hands a soy-six-pump-extra-hot-no-water chai to 19-year-old flame-haired singer Hayley Williams. "But it's still hardly hot at all." Williams gamely accepts the tea. Crisis averted.

Paramore earned a gold record for their second album, *Riot!*, in November, and a Best New Artist Grammy nomination in December (although every third caffeine fiend in the place might have a gold record over his or her mantle at home). Williams and Farro are inspecting a white-and-orange-striped scarf that will be sold on an upcoming tour. It's a little wide, Williams figures, draping it around her diminutive frame, and it might look better if the orange was as bright on both sides. The text on the tag might be placed wrong, too.

"But I'm nitpicking," she says, smiling sweetly. "If it looks like we have some crazy designer thing and we're some little band, that wouldn't look right, would it?"

She says this earnestly, but Paramore haven't really been a little band for some time. They were little, in a few senses, for a year or so after the release of their 2005 debut, *All We Know Is Falling* (on emo powerhouse Fueled by Ramen), while then-16-year-old Williams' dad was piloting the band's tour van and she and then-15-year-old drummer Zac Farro were scribbling homework before soundcheck. They've since sold 178,000 copies of *Falling*, and by the time the fiercely insistent chorus of sweet-revenge anthem "Misery Business" (from *Riot!*) hit *TRL*, bigness was looming. Six hundred and fifty thousand copies of *Riot!* later, the band rang in 2008 on MTV, shivering with VJ Damien Fahey as the Times Square ball dropped on *Tila Tequila's New Year's Eve Masquerade*.

Back at home in early January—their nearly monthlong break around the holidays being the longest they've had in years—things don't seem all that big or all that different. Josh packs Williams and her lukewarm tea into his 1995 Toyota Camry four-door sedan, and they roll past the 70-year-old Franklin Cinema and out of Franklin's 15-block, Old South—charming downtown into the sprawl of manicured upper-middle-class suburbs.

On these rare occasions when they're home, the members of Paramore congregate in the converted attic at friend Ajax's parents' place. They play video games, watch movies, and tussle with Ajax's boxer, Roxy. Ajax, a genial jeans-and-T-shirt guy in a black beanie, is as regular-kid as they come, without the magazine-ready haircuts and musical ability, his four friends would probably come off the same way.

"Hayley and I were talking last night," says Josh, perching on Ajax's couch, as Zac, 17, pulls up a chair. "We were in my car, and 'Misery Business' came on the radio. It doesn't feel like it's us. It's like, wow...." Williams nods slowly in agreement.

Although the quartet have spent enough time on tour in the past three years for their Bible



"We don't want people's first look at Paramore to be me by myself."

HAYLEY WILLIAMS

ON HAYLEY
WILLIAMS: DIXY
JEANS JACKET,
AMERICAN EAGLE
OUTFITTERS
TANK, ROGUES
GALLERY SCARF,
TRIPP JEANS.







FROM LEFT, ON ZAC FRON: J. LINDBERG JACKET, SIXTY-SHIRT AND TIE, SUPERFINE JEANS, COSTUME NATIONAL BOOTS. ON HAYLEY WILLIAMS: H&M BLAZER AND DRESS, MISS SIXTY BELT, WOLFORD LEGGINGS, DR. MARTENS BOOTS. ON JEREMY DAVIS: PENFIELD SHIRT, BUCKLER VEST, H&M JEANS, OODS BOOTS. ON JOSH FARRRO: TOPMAN CARDIGAN AND SHOES, ROGAN T-SHIRT, B-STAR JEANS. FOR INFO, SEE WHERE TO BUY.

MAKEUP BY MEGAN THOMPSON FOR MAXIMUM ARTIST CREATIVE SERVICES. HAIR BY BRIAN O'CONNOR. SPECIAL THANKS TO HOTEL PRESTON, NASHVILLE.

Belt upbringing to lapse, those values remain evident. Swearing is uncommon, hugs are plentiful; if there's an addiction afoot, it's to Sonic milk shakes. But wholesome as Paramore's four devoutly Christian members might be, they understood early on that they still weren't wholesome enough to stick to the Christian-rock market so omnipresent in their hometown. (Although they did do early gigs at Christian-rock fests like Cornerstone and Purple Door.)

"When you do Christian music, you get put on this pedestal," Josh says. "And if you do anything wrong—like dye your hair the wrong color—it's a sin."

Williams, whose firecracker follicles have presumably sealed her own damnation, interjects, "What would we have done when we wrote 'Misery Business'?" A song about stealing back a stolen boyfriend that uses the word *where* certainly would not slip unnoticed onto Christian radio. (Rumors have persisted that the boyfriend in question is guitarist Farro, yet he and Williams publicly insist they've never dated.) "Writing that definitely helped me and the guys through a really difficult issue, and something that you could say kind of controlled my spirit."

The band they are right now, Fueled by Ramen president John Janick figures, could be about to change profoundly. Janick's tended over Paramore since their baby-faced beginnings, along with other FBR bands such as Fall Out Boy and Panic at the Disco as they followed similar (if sharper) arcs. He's not expecting Paramore to stay less famous than his flagship bands much longer, and their status as early adopters of the so-called all-encompassing "360 deal" may provide the longevity that has eluded many of their emo peers. "When I gave them their gold record, it was really an emotional thing," Janick says, "because I feel almost like they're family, and seeing them get that—I felt like it was gonna start the chain reaction. They're set up well to take what's going to be coming at them, and I believe they're gonna be around a long time."

Back home in Franklin, Paramore get hints—like the Hot Topic clerk who blasts *Riot!* as bassist Jeremy Davis, the band's grizzled elder at 22, shops. "Everybody says it's gonna get worse," Zac says, shrugging. "But it's not as bad as everybody says—'Oh, y'all probably get mauled at the mall, don't cha?'"

That kind of stuff does happen in the U.K., though, and it largely happens to Williams. The three guys can walk down London streets unbothered, Josh says, smirking at Williams. "For her, it's like, 'Hayley Williams, come here!'" he mock squeals.

They admit to frustration with how the British press singles Williams out, putting her on magazine covers alone. She frets that her bandmates don't get the recognition they deserve, and in hopes of combating this, his U.K. stages in a T-shirt scribbled with **PARAMORE IS A BAND**, perhaps a nod to the **BLONDE IS A GROUP** buttons of almost 30 years ago. She feels less singled out in the States, and it's a relief.

"I think it's because we've tried to be really smart about marketing our image," she says. "We're just breaking into this mainstream world, and people are hearing about us for the first time. And we don't want their first look at Paramore to be me by myself—even if it says 'Hayley of Paramore,' it's that face, they're gonna see that. Until we feel comfortable and feel like the world knows who Paramore is as a whole, then we're gonna keep fighting to show people our whole band."

"We know exactly what we want, all the time," Josh says. "We're not gonna let anybody come in and tell us what to do, because it's not their band."

What Williams wants now, though, is a ride back to the apartment she shares with best friend Bekah, since she'll be up at 7 a.m., learning to shoot guns. She got a gift certificate for lessons from her grandmother, and the lessons, she figures, definitely threaten to be interesting, if ethically challenging. "I'm not sure how I feel politically," she says. You start to worry about all your choices, maybe, when hundreds of thousands of teens anoint you a hero via MySpace and LiveJournal posts. Role model isn't a job she signed up for, and the prospect scares her, even if her three bandmates agree she makes a great one.

"It's gonna happen, no matter what," Williams says, somewhat timidly. "But I still think it's cool that, I don't know, a 30-minute break between *Tila Tequila* and *The Real World* can be something we were a part of. And it's real—it's not scripted, or topless, or shimmying like a pole dancer." ☘

"We know exactly what we want, all the time."
JOSH FARRO



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Racing Against Time

Alt rock's inconsistent elders floor it to the fountain of youth BY JOSH MODELL

R.E.M.

Accelerate ★★★★★



R.E.M.'s last album, *Accelerate*, stays on my shelf only for the sake of catalog completeness; It's been freed once or twice since 2004 to be dusted off and quickly reassessed: Did a band this important really release something so incomprehensibly dull and unrelentingly bored with itself? Well, they did. And Michael Stipe—the one singing and wearing raccoon eye shadow lately—even acknowledged the misstep, admitting that the group had lost focus, and that he, guitarist Peter Buck, and bassist Mike Mills “didn’t talk... for a couple of records.” The slow-moving,

keyboard-heavy, adult-contemporary-leaning Sun felt like a sputtering roadside breakdown for a band that was running on fumes. But the critical and commercial shrugs that met the album seem to have had one overwhelmingly positive effect: They gave R.E.M. something to prove.

Nothing to do, then, but hit the gas and hope for the best, a method *Accelerate*—R.E.M.'s 14th studio album—establishes right there in the title. Whether inspired by their own stagnation, market forces, or producer Jackknife Lee, the decision to lift the rock restraining order worked wonders: *Accelerate* corrals 35 minutes of the fastest songs Stipe and Co. have written in decades, all performed with a sense of joyous purpose that clearly comes from a “Fuck it, let’s just do this” attitude. They haven’t sounded this surprised with themselves since 1998’s *Up*,

haven’t made an album this consistent since 1992’s *Automatic for the People*, and haven’t redlined so engagingly since 1986’s *Lifes Rich Pageant*, whose terrific “These Days” lives on in spirit here.

And though populated almost exclusively by snarling guitars and hell-bent drums, *Accelerate* doesn’t suffer any whiffs

They haven’t redlined so engagingly since *Lifes Rich Pageant*.

of desperation like 1994’s half-decent, glam-rock youth grab, *Monster*. Instead, here’s a band rediscovering the shadings and strengths of rock’n’roll elementalism. Sure, album bookends “Living Well is the Best Revenge” and “I’m Gonna DJ” share the same basic ingredients and roughly

the same tempo, but the former looks lovingly at R.E.M.’s distant rockin’ past, while the near-ecstatic latter (“Death is pretty final / I’m collecting vinyl / I’m gonna DJ at the end of the world”) offers conclusive proof they haven’t lost their inspiration completely in recent years.

More than just velocity lifts *Accelerate*: It stows for the requisite Important Ballad (“Until the Day Is Done”), a political brooder more akin to “Drive” than “Everybody Hurts,” and the terrific, mid-tempo “Hollow Man,” with the most satisfying R.E.M. chorus in eons. Still, *Accelerate* will be rightfully championed as the defibrillator that shocked a once-great band back to its senses. R.E.M. lay no claim to being the biggest rock group on earth—leave that empty title to their contemporary U2—but if they need an award, here’s one that fits: Most Improved.

American Music Club

The Golden Age ★★½

MERGE

Another (edgy) stroll down the indie-rock Via Dolorosa American Music Club produced perhaps the most emotionally intense indie rock of the late '80s and early '90s. Singer Mark Eitzel can silence a room with his beautiful-loser conviction, but his brain is too abuzz with ambivalence to ever settle for simple angst or lovelorn gloom. After their ten-year reunion in 2004, AMC now features Eitzel and guitarist Vudi with a new rhythm section, and The

Golden Age is their most placid since 1989's *United Kingdom*. Not even Eitzel's political anger jolts him out of his even-tempered groove, with acoustic fingerpicking fading into discordant electric guitar ("The Stars") and then back into beats that sashay like ballroom waltzes.

ROB O'CONNOR

Antietam

Opus Mixtum ★★½

CARROT TOP

Kitchen-sink genius from vets of '80s underground wars

Now in their third decade, this Kentucky-spawned, New York-based trio could

pass for a bunch of eager newcomers who can't decide what kind of band they want to be when they grow up. Although the two-disc, 26-track *Opus Mixtum* lacks focus, the sprawl of ideas is dazzling: tensely elegant rockers ("Pennants and Flags"), mesmerizing free-form instrumentals (the nine-minute "Tierra del Fuego"), psychedelic fusion ("King Me"), and good old-fashioned punk aggression ("You/It"). As always, Tara Key's husky, off-hand vocals and inventive yet precise guitar embody hip charisma, generating heat without straining for effect. JON YOUNG



Autechre: no relation to Deacon Martin Brown

Apes

Ghost Games ★★

GRIPPY EYES

Dive noisesilk broaden their sound, lose the deranged edge

Apes' fourth album is vexing in ways both pro and con. The band retains the frenzied organ chug and indie-prog lurch of days past, and newish frontman Breck Brunson (who joined in 2006) is an impressively expressive yelper, but *Ghost Games* never skirts the border of sanity as much as it threatens to. That's fine for a gentle swayer like "Walk Thru Walls" or the dramatic, Devo-indebted rush of "Speech Reach," but for a band built to freak out, too many of the songs here play it safe. Also, no one ever needs to endure the indie-rock equivalent of between-song skits.

JOSH MODEL

Atlas Sound

Let the Blind Lead Those Who Can See but Cannot Feel ★★½

KRANKY

Eccentric avant-punk raconteur takes it back to the womb in a recent interview, controversial Deerhunter frontman Bradford Cox claimed that the Atlanta band's 2007 breakout album, *Cryptograms*, was recorded in a "hypernostalgic" state of adolescence. For his solo turn as Atlas Sound, Cox regresses even further. Operating with a child's ghost story, the music works itself in a shoegaze gauze. "Quarantined" melds distorted Flamingo Lips-style drums to twinkling nimbuses, "Scraping Past" sounds like a *Kid A* orphan (a good thing), and a *Loveless* smog pervades all. In flashing back, Cox smears just the right amount of Vaseline on the lens. ANDY BETA

Autechre

Quaristice ★★

WARP

Sexy odes and computer codes from laptop lotharios The more IDM acts mine cut-up bin luminaries like the Art of Noise, the better. True, Autechre architects Sean Booth and Rob Brown specialize in harder, spazzier beats than those that powered that group's deathless '80s robo-jam "Close (to the Edit)."

But get past glitchy irritants like "SonDeremawe" and an arduous payoff of cerebral, booty-shaking decadence awaits on their ninth album. "Tankern" boasts heavy-breathing percussion and keyboard squiggles, while beatless set-opener "Altibzz" will make you love Booth and Brown for more than just their minds: Simultaneously melancholy and lascivious, it's pure rural pleasure.

SHANNON ZIMMERMAN

Bauhaus

Go Away White ★★½

BAUHAUS MUSIC

Legendary nosferatus of post-punk stalk the night once more Bauhaus may have godfathered goth at the end of the 1970s, but their combustible early dance singles like "Kick in the Eye" could give most current disco-rock trends a smack-down. For their first studio disc in 25 years, the English quartet flit from riffed-out social criticism to anguished balladry, often sounding more like a cross between singer Peter Murphy's brooding solo efforts and splinter group Love and Rockets' buzzing groove rock than the dubbed-up glam-punk band that birthed both. Yet even a tastefully matured Bauhaus produce enough fractured guitar and howling melodrama to wake the undead. BARRY WALTERS



Heavy hang the heads that wore alt rock's crown.

Manning Up

Well-traveled frontdudes carry the burden of experience

The Gutter Twins

Saturnalia ★★½

SUB POP

Alternative-rock vets Greg Dull and Mark Lanegan managed to transcend '90s grunge with the Afghan Whigs and Screaming Trees, respectively. Dull now does business as the Twilight Singers, while Lanegan makes solo albums and lends his nicotine-scarred pipes to other people's albums, including Queens of the Stone Age's and Dinosaur Jr.'s. Both struggled with drug abuse—they lived, friends didn't. They've spent the 21st

century trying to figure out how to age respectably, if not gracefully, without selling their souls to Satan or Botox. And they've stayed pals over time. This is tough for guys in their 40s. Just ask one.

So *Saturnalia* naturally vibes as a record made by men who

These are men who haven't worn a band T-shirt in years.

haven't worn a band T-shirt to a bar in years. Mortality, regret, guilt, and whatever remains of passion after you say "I was in love with you" all weigh heavily on these

two. Fortunately, they're both versed in meaty riffs, acoustic drama, noirish electronics, and a nice heavy backbeat.

The grimy boogie on "Idle Hands" reminds us that "we are the devil's playthings." Dull is more convinced than ever that "life is shame, and your hands are stained," especially when he's talking about himself. "Hold on" Lanegan intones on "All Misery/Flowers," as if he barely can. These guys sound like they're genuinely torn between looking up at the stars and trying to find an exit to the sewer. Neat trick, that. JOE GROSS

Beach House Devotion ★★½

CARMEK

Aesthetically deft dream pop from blissed-out Baltimoreans. Complaining that Alex Scally and Victoria Legrand lack song-writing chops misses the point: Beach House, the duo's musical moniker, is a sonic connoisseur's workshop, and the pair have impeccable taste. On *Devotion*, slow-motion organ washes over precisely twanged guitar while Legrand slides sensuously accented phonemes through the hazy mix. The effect is like a vaguely remembered, pleasantly low-key dream. Scally and Legrand toss in a real tune, too: Jad Fair and Daniel Johnston's "Some Things Last a Long Time." Rendered with chiming guitars and haunted vocals, it's the album's emotional centerpiece.

SHANNON ZIMMERMAN

Bell X1 Flock ★★½

YEP DOC

Sensative Irish lads give silly love songs a serious makeover

The U.S. debut of Damien Rice's former band turns sentimental mush into something surprisingly palatable. Paul Noonan has a sweetly apologetic voice that matches the songs' creamy melodies, but he tweaks the formula subtly. "When your hand brushed against mine, I thought I'd collapse," he sighs on "Flame," then slips into a jaunty clap-

along about toasting marshmallows. Elsewhere, he punctuates the moxy "Bad Skin Day" by muttering, "Christ, I'm such a drama queen," cleverly mocking romantic clichés and drawing on their emotional power at the same time. **JON YOUNG**

Black Tide Light From Above ★★½

INTERSCORE

If Axl Rose and Uta Fort produced a love child at the Cathouse...

With an average age of 17—the youngest member is a 15-year-old with Sebastian Bach pipes—this Miami quartet never whiffed the Aqua Net of the late-'80s era they're raving. But unlike tourmates Avenged Sevenfold, *Black Tide* haven't resurrected '80s Sunset Strip metal as a secondhand Vegas cabaret act; they actually sound as mean and hungry as the rats (Guns N' Roses, W.A.S.R.) who once prowled Hollywood's gutters. And when they drop the Metallica hammer ("Warriors of Time"), they're a raging reminder that the Strip once had Bay Area thrash cred to match its glam ambitions. **AARON BURGESS**

Bon Iver For Emma, Forever Ago ★★½

JAGGUAIR

Tenderly comforting songs emerge from a cold, lonely place

Bon Iver's Justin Vernon spent last winter holed up in rural

Wisconsin with his guitars, some recording equipment, and a broken heart. When the snow melted, he returned with ten sparse, searching songs that gorgeously evoke the desolate beauty of those surroundings. Vernon's voice—delicately layered and yearning—gives standouts "Skinny Love" and "Flume" their stunningly direct emotional impact, but his sturdy folk chords, earthy melodies, and plainspoken, pastoral lyrics prevent the album from descending into self-pity. Play *Emma* when your fire burns low. It'll help keep you warm. **DAVID MARCHESE**

Born Ruffians Red, Yellow and Blue ★★

WARN

Doing the iPod shuffle through 40 years of rock's next big things

Since the early '90s, indie rock has been rapidly assimilating and responding to its own trends. And in today's accelerated digital culture, that process has rocketed forward. Take *Born Ruffians*' sophomore disc, which sounds just as dizzily nostalgic for buzz bands of ten minutes ago (Clap Your Hands Say Yeah) as for Modest Mouse or '70s British punk or the Beach Boys. Like most young indie acts, the Ruffians are far better the less seriously they take themselves: While the title track is a rather embarrassing stab at sociopolitical commentary, the rest of the album—with jangly guitars,

Reissues

The best finds of the month BY WILL HERMES



Back: Sterling kisses from inexpress faces

Beck Odelay Deluxe ★★½

GEFFEN/UMe

Who cares if he big ups L Ron Hubbard on mix tapes? This splatter painting of breakbeats, electric blues, garage-sale kitsch, and Dada verisimilitude still sounds fresh, even though folks—Beck himself included—have cherry-picked its ideas. Why buy it again? Cool deflated cover art; notes by Thurston Moore, Dave Eggers, and 15 random high school students; plus a disc of high-grade ephemera (see "Burro," a mariachi-fueled version of "Jacksack" that belongs on a jukebox in a Roberto Rodriguez flick).

Various Artists

BLJPRP: French Synthwave 1978–85

EVERLONG

If German electronic music is about precision engineering, the French love it or brut (see the Ed Bangier label), and this set of obscure synth pop suggests it was ever thus. Vox Dei imagine Ian Curtis as a short-fused Parisian, but Mary Moor delivers the most existential moment, cooling over Atari percussion, "It's a pretty day to die."

Nick Lowe Jesus of Cool: 30th Anniversary Edition ★★

YEP DOC

Last year's *At My Age* was smart, and shockingly good, classicism. But Lowe's 1978 debut remains his finest moment, a mix of acid music-bike snark with songcraft that lived up to the title of the nonblasphemous U.S. version, *Pure Pop for New People*. This update combines both versions, plus worthy extras. And if it occasionally sounds

like golden-age Elvis Costello, that's because Lowe produced him, too.

Loren Connors

As Roses Brew: Collected Airs 1992–2002 ★★

FAMILY VINEYARD

These electric, mostly solo pieces by Connors—a Sonic Youth avant-garde colleague with 80-some releases—are like magic incantations. Nominally rooted in Irish traditional music, they move like butter melting over pancakes, slowing time, magnifying the world's beauty, and promoting samadhi.

Lee Hazlewood

Strung Out on Something New: The Reprise Recordings ★★½

REPRISE/PHONO HANDMADE

Hazlewood's indie profile got a boost in the '90s with choice reissues on Smells Like Records. But with the eccentric singer/songwriter/producer's death last year, the vaults are being scoured. These 50-plus songs are a cross section of his 1960s idiosyncrasy: country-pop corn ("Sally Was a Good Old Girl"), protest folk fatalism ("Have You Made Any New Bombs Today?"), and Nehru-jacketed crooning ("I Am, You Are").

Various Artists

Meloidi Tuvi: Threat Songs and Folk Tunes From Tuva ★★½

DUST TO DIGITAL

With weird vocals now sacred in indie circles (Joanna Newsom, Antony, etc.), these 1968 recordings of Tuva throat singers and other U.S.S.R. folkies should be blessed texts. These guys croak a few words, then literally split their voices in two, producing a low drone and a high, flute-like whistle simultaneously. Makes Tom Waits sound like Tom Jones.



Born Ruffians: Bubble fights and biting their favorite bands—the usual routine for youthful Canadian rockers

ragged melodies, ooh-wah choruses, and warbled vocals—is a blast of anxious, giddy energy. **BRET GLADSTONE**

Foxy Brown

Brooklyn's Don Diva ★★

BLACKPANTHER

Battling tabloids and prison time, the not-so ill Na Na stumbles

On her first album since 2001's underrated *Broken Silence*, Foxy Brown name-checks the New York Post's Page Six three times. It makes sense, though, since the currently incarcerated Brown has recently made more headlines with her bizarre antics than her music. Brooklyn's Don Diva won't change that. Though still capable of a clever line ("Acting like I'm a one-hit wonder / Ain't No Niggas" gave Jay his first summer"), Fox gets tripped up by uninspired rap-reggae mash-ups, electro-pop beats better suited for Nelly Furtado, and rhymes that dwell on designer labels and raunchy sex. What was brash and provocative in 1996 is merely cliché in 2008. **THOMAS COLOMPOULOS**

Cadence Weapon

Afterparty Babies ★★★

ANTD

Conclusive proof that at least one music critic can actually rap. An aem MC who occasionally seems too indebted to indie

hip-hop convention—multiple clever allusions per verse; using 20 words when five will do; and the need to crowd in discordant, annoying sounds—Canadian blogger/Pitchfork writer Rollie Pemberton might have a killer crossover album in him someday. There's time: He's only 21 and already sophisticated enough to paste lines about real heartbreak onto chunky, melodic beats ("True Story"), then turn around and be an equally passionate goof-ball ("Getting Dumb"). Leaning toward the latter could make him a star outside the backpack circuit. **JOSH MODELL**

Mile Caro & Franck Garcia

Pain Disappears ★★★½

BUZZIN' FLY

Hotshot French DJs push glitchy Berlin techno overground

For the past few years, minimal German dance music, with its fierce emptiness and slim rhythms, has been a scene with untapped crossover potential. And Mile Caro, DJ at Paris' renowned house-music club Rex, and Franck Garcia, a producer/DJ based in the south of France, take advantage of the hypnotic genre's possibilities. On endlessly listenable tracks about modern love affairs ("Always You," "Dead Souls"), the pair know exactly how to

mate insinuating pop-song moodiness with the beats' lambent emotional power. **JAMES HUNTER**

Karen Dalton

Cotton Eyed Joe ★★★★★

DELAMORE RECORDINGS

Bob Dylan called her the Billie Holiday of folk for a reason

Many decades before Chan Marshall got to Memphis, Karen Dalton was crafting achingly mournful cover-version masterpieces out of traditional folk, pop, soul, and country songs. Recorded in 1962 at a small club in Boulder, Colorado, these 21 tracks reveal Dalton's effortless picking and exquisitely mysterious voice, while she paints the blues a shade darker than usual. As a dissonant guitar twists Ray Charles' "It's Alright" into a ghostly lament and a prison-work chorale escapes into an open, rolling rhythm ("Prettiest Train"), she imbues every note with a forlorn strength, proving her masterly command of both the material and the audience. **ABBY EVERDELL**

Danava

Unonou ★★★

KEMADO

Is it hipster metal or real metal? Does it matter? Discuss.

This Portland, Oregon quartet piece together a lyrical cocktail of stoner sludge, prog pomp, and rocket blasts off on their second album. Pining a heavy thump under the melody, they turn paradiddles on a dime, swirl toward the stratosphere, sink back into rainy-day cave dwellings, experiment with Moog and cello and woodwind and horns, even bang heads now and then. Slight problem: They only intermittently catch a groove—and Dusty Sparkles' howl tends to lack the gravity to keep the concoction from getting lost in space. **CHUCK EDDY**

Dead Meadow

Old Growth ★★★★★

MATADOR

Trippy riffmongers allow some light into their dark din

Psychedelic blues rockers Dead Meadow relocated from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles last year, and their sixth album sounds reenergized by the scenery change. The trio still combine '60s garage junk with thick jams that channel



"Did you hear the one about the Necronomicon?"

Folk Tales

Indie rock's writer-in-residence weighs in

The Mountain Goats

Heretic Pride ★★★★★

4AD

On the last two Mountain Goats albums, singer/guitarist John Darnielle exchanged the densely detailed character studies of his earlier records for an introspective account of his troubled childhood. Here he returns to the short-story approach that established him as one of pop's savviest lyricists: Among other topics, *Heretic Pride* includes tunes about crime novelist Sax Rohmer, the death of reggae figure Prince Far I, and sci-fi/horror guru H.P. Lovecraft's move to Brooklyn. But if Darnielle has satisfied his autobiographical jones, this batch of tunes is still suffused with the confessional vibe that made *The Sunset Tree* and *Get Lonely* unlikely em-folk touchstones.

Some of that is due to the finely drawn chamber-twang arrangements, produced by Scott Solter with help from John Vanderslice, and played in part by St. Vincent's Annie Clark, cellist Erik Friedlander, and Superchunk drummer Jon Wurster. As always on a Mountain Goats record, though, it's about Darnielle's writing—the extra moment

The album title was swiped from a black-metal band.

he spends admiring the young couple having a baby in a California motel room in "San Bernardino" or his wry sympathy for the nonbeliever being burned at the stake in "Heretic Pride" (whose title, he admits in the CD's press materials, was swiped from a Norwegian black-metal band). That's good storytelling, of course, but it's also a clever bit of real life poking through the fiction. **MIKHAEL WOOD**



Danava: Not only do their guitars shred, but so do their mustaches.

PART ONE
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Flogging Molly: The only Celtic punks to don traditional rubber boots

Iron Butterfly heaviness, but their new songs are sunnier and jumpier than 2005's dirgeful *Feathers*. There's also a more melodic tinge, as spacey explorations "Till Kingdom Come" and "Seven Seers" get a boost from hummable hooks and mostly fuzz-free production. Frontman Jason Simon exploits the extra breathing room, using his ghostly croon to spin trippy tales about hard-living dreamers and their near-religious hallucinations. **KYLE ANDERSON**

DeVotchKa

A Mad and Faithful Telling ★★½

ANT-

Cheerful, eclectic lunacy with a heart as big as the world

DeVotchKa gained mainstream exposure in 2006 via their Grammy-nominated score for *Little Miss Sunshine*, but the Denver band still cavort like daffy outsiders on their stirring fifth album, a sultry brew of Gypsy, Mexican, and pop ingredients that's adorably silly

and unexpectedly moving. A dizzy crooner in the mode of Andrew Bird and Rufus Wainwright, ringmaster Nick Urata celebrates heartbreak, desire, and other grand themes, driven by a craving for attention and the urge to put on a big show. If the itchy "Head Honcho" doesn't grab you, you're lost. **JON YOUNG**

The Epochs

The Epochs ★★½

REBEL GROUP

Searching for the soulful paranoia behind "Sussudio"

Dabblers rarely make great rockers, because without a believable level of commitment, even the most solid songs come off as strained and overworked. On their debut, Brooklyn's Epochs dabble mercilessly, dipping into the murky connections between TV on the Radio and '80s Phil Collins, but without the bite of the former or the catchiness of the latter. Bright spots flicker—the incongruously folksy "Head in the Fire"—but most of the

time, *The Epochs* counts on atmosphere to carry it, an atmosphere it never really rises above. **JOSH MODEL**

Flogging Molly

Float ★★½

SIDECHORDJIMMY

Gaelic rabble-rousers pour out more Guinness for their homies

As much as Flogging Molly's spirited Irish punk brings to mind the Pogues (as well as rowdy pub elders the Dubliners), the Los Angeles septet are as notable for their non-Celtic influences. On *Float*, beneath the Warped-rousing riffs and the freewheeling accordion, banjo, and fiddle, you can hear Motorhead's bass rig ("Man With No Country"), Johnny Cash's Folsom period ("You Won't Make a Fool Out of Me"), and even tinges of John Lennon's touching balladry ("The Story So Far"). It's the band's most diverse album yet—and, diversity being their strength, it's also their most accomplished. **AARON BURGESS**



Hungry Beast!



The temp agency had no idea what to do with them.

Sweet and Lowdown

Danish rock duo embrace their gloriously trashy roots

The Raveonettes Lust Lust Lust ★★ ★★

VICE

This style-foxed pair first appeared several years ago with a heat-seeking update of the Jesus and Mary Chain's fuzzy-soaked '60s-pop thing. But unlike the Reid brothers, singer/guitarist Sune Rose Wagner and singer/bassist Sharin Foo looked like people who'd rather be having sex in an alley than poring over Brian Wilson's old studio logs by candlelight. So it was disappointing that on 2005's *Pretty in Black*, the Raveonettes drained most of the scazz from their sound, making a run for respectability when it was precisely their junk-culture irreverence that made them worth hearing in the first place.

As its title suggests, *Lust Lust Lust* returns the group to the gutter from whence they sprang. Recorded

on what might as well have been two-for-one rolls of masking tape, the album bleeds distortion from every possible surface—and not the high-end Steve Albini stuff, either. On "Hallucinations" and "Sad Transmission," it's unclear whether the two are playing guitars or vacuum cleaners. Rhythms come in the form of dollar-store

***Lust Lust Lust* returns the group to the gutter from whence they sprang.**

drum-machine beats, while the harmony vocals prize attitude over intelligibility. (No biggie, considering their unfortunate weakness for tired candy-shop metaphors.) Yet ultimately, all this willful messiness adds up to a funny and surprisingly touching mission statement, a dirty-sweet testament to rock'n'roll's enduring ability to reflect desire in all its forms. **MIKAEL WOOD**

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Genghis Tron

Board Up the House ★★½
RELEASE

A metal horde that will pillage your village with synthesizers. Like futuristic sonic nomads, this Philly-based trio trade live drums, heavy metal's elemental building block, for portable circuit boards. But their second album still possesses a remarkable brutality—lacerating vocals are pitched to manic electronics that clip-clop and then stampe through peals of guitar. We've seen recent synth-core chimeras (Horse the Band, Enter Shikari), but they don't approach the majestic weirdness of Genghis Tron: Febrile Moog mirages ("City on a Hill"), adenoidal eight-bit swarms ("Colony Collapse"), and digital desert winds ("The Whips Blow Back") conjure a uniquely strange and powerful landscape. **ALEX BENENSON**

Ghostland Observatory

Robotique Majestique ★★½
TRASHY MOPED

Daft punk-worshipping duo gets sunter, bleaker, slower, weaker. They sound like the future, if the future was desolate, clinical, and Tron: the electro-poppers' third album mainly deletes the fun rock scruff of 2006's *Paparazzi* Lightning, pushing a more woozy cache

of synth beeps. Beatmaker Thomas Turner taps out long Daft-like instrumentals that strain for the ether, and flamboyant singer Aaron Blevins, a man no helmet could contain, smacks 'em up now and again with his stuck-pig squeal ("HFM," "No Place for Me"). In those rare moments when they're truly wired, Texas' odd couple bring quirky soul to the music of machines. **STACEY ANDERSON**

Goldfrapp

Seventh Tree ★★½
MUTE

The psych-folk revival claims another victim, tedium ensues. Alison Goldfrapp, who has excelled as a Shirley Bassey progeny and fabulously wispy club diva, is now declaring her psychedelic and British folk influences. Partner/producer Will Gregory's swirly keyboards ("Little Bird") and gentle acoustic strums ("Clowns") help shape the new glam-free, vamp-deprived sound but add little creativity. Fortunately, Goldfrapp still has that voice. She carries the breezy "Happiness" with such delicate care that, at least for a few minutes, you don't miss her familiar strut. Still, the duo are too consistently subdued, and without their usual spectacle, *Seventh Tree* veers perilously close to dull. **LINDSEY THOMAS**



Alison Goldfrapp tries to keep her Disney Channel options open.

Growing

Lateral ★★★½
SOCIAL REGISTRY

Otherworldly soundscapes to haunt your noirish sci-fi dreams. More power to this dreaming Brooklyn duo for devising a moving, often subtly gorgeous sound at a time when every hipster and his YA sponsor has a "killer ambient-noise side project." These four pieces never sacrifice forward motion and melody—or at least hooks—for obtuse atmosphere, blending electronic flickers with washes of amplifier buzz and a surprisingly heavy rumble. It's easy to think this sort of shimmer running through the head of tormented replicant leader Roy Batty as he dies at the end of *Blade Runner*. **JOE GROSS**

Headlights

Some Racing, Some Stopping ★★½
POLYVINT

Cutie-pie pop rockers who can still hold their own in a fight. Indie pop as precious as Headlights' needs plenty of built-in wimp repellent: muscular guitars, beats with a modicum of backbone, and enough melody to keep the songs from collapsing in a pile of cutesy goo. Though this Illinois band's second album is even more twee than 2006's enchanting debut, it also ditches some of that record's fuzz and clutter in favor of more classic rock sounds. The boy-boy-girl three-some finds grace in simple accoutrements—strings and bells tickle the Rilo Kiley-esque "On April 2," while doo doo joos color the title track. Calling Headlights "nicer" sounds like a backhanded compliment, but *Some Racing* wears the tag proudly: It's charming, but never boring. **JOSH MODELL**

Hello, Blue Roses

The Portrait Is Finished and I Have Failed to Capture Your Beauty... ★★½
LOUST MUSIC

Like an updated Wings, if Linda McCartney could really sing. Vancouver visual artist/songwriter Sydney Vermont and boyfriend Dan Bejar (of the New Pornographers, Destroyer, and Swan Lake) have spent the past two years quietly assembling their debut album's sublime folk rock. With Bejar playing multiple instruments [synths,

Essentials

Rockability BY JOE GROSS



The Cramps: Yes, their pussy can do the dog.

Elvis Presley

Sunrise
RCA, 1999

Rockability was rock'n'roll in fetal form—guitar twang, slap-bass, and hard-swinging drums, pure Southern swagger birthed of hick country and urbane R&B. Elvis' mid-'50s Sun Records sides defined the genre's parameters and possibilities, all thump, hiccup, and sneer. They also changed Western civilization.

Buddy Holly

Gold
GEMIN, 2005

After inventing two-guitar-bass-drums rock in 1957, and before dying a saint at 22, this boy genius demonstrated nearly everywhere rockability could go, from classic burners ("That'll Be the Day," "Not Fade Away," "Rave On") to Tin Pan Alley pop ("Raining in My Heart") to the Beatles ("Learning the Game").

Link Wray

Rumble! The Best of Link Wray
RHINO, 1993

This one-lunged, part Shawnee, Korean War-vet guitarist didn't invent distortion, but these thrilling instrumentalists made it an essential part of the rock vocabulary. The title track, with its switchblade-sexy vibe, was banned from radio. Others ("Ace of Spades," "Jack the Ripper") created punkability.

Charlie Feathers

Get With It: Essential Recordings 1954-1969
REVENANT, 1998

No-hit wonders are crucial to rockability's story, and Feathers was the music's original oddball, a shi-talking, Muppet-voiced cut generator. Disc one's white-hot singles

move from hillbilly bitterness ("I've Been Deceived") to eerie T&A ("Jungle Fever"). Disc two's demos run up until '69, including two killer duets with bluesman Junior Kimbrough.

Gene Vincent

Bluejean Bop! Gene Vincent and the Blue Caps
COLLECTABLES, 1996

Elvis sang it, Wray strummed it, but Vincent—a pill-popping, leather-clad drunk—lived it. This twofold moves from the first album's raucous hit-making ("Bluejean Bop") to the second's spare and savage menace. Check his "Catman" scream and hear this thug break on through to the other side.

Various Artists

Rockabilly 1950s Punk & Rockabilly
RHINO, 2006

There are about a billion rockability comps, but this four-CD box set smartly combines listenability with obscurity. Hits are here, but dig the orgasms both metaphorical (Wanda Jackson's pumping powerhouse "Fujjyama Mama") and shockingly literal (John & Jackie's "Little Girl")

The Cramps

...Off the Bone
ALGAL, 1981

These American badasses worshiped junk culture and reminded everyone that rockability was proto-punk. Includes the Rawless Grooves EP (the flit-flaunting "Human Fly," the howling "Domino") with stunning tracks from their prime '80s era (a cover of Harse Adkins' "She Said," "Garbage Man"). One of the smartest, funniest, most intense bands ever.

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guitar, piano, percussion), arranging, and providing Al Stewart-meets-Hunky Dory backup vocals, Vermont's quavering alto evokes the haunting aura of '60s folk legend Sandy Denny. The foundation is largely acoustic and intimate, though the duo occasionally go for a wider screen (the Cocteau Twins nod "Shadow Falls," the Prefab Sprout-ish "St. Angela"). And once listeners experience the beauty of "Scarecrow" and "Heron Song," dust may start gathering on those Feathers and Joanna Newsom CD cases. **ANDREW EARLES**

Howlin Rain

Magnificent Fiend ★★★

BIRMINGHAM/AMERICAN

Well-read retro Californians eagerly pummel your eardrums

This project from Comets on Fire leader Ethan Miller specializes in the kind of trashy white-boy R&B practiced by everyone from Humble Pie to the Black Crowes. Despite literary ambitions—Miller cites novelists Michael Moorcock and James M. Cain as inspirations—and interludes of delicate loveliness (like the tangy, fluttering guitars of "Goodbye Ruby"), the quintet's sludgy roar overshadows any lyrical flair, with Miller's sandpaper howl leading the

attack. When he bellows, "Lord, have mercy on my soul," the result is hokey, irresistible fun. **JON YOUNG**

Hymns

Travel in Herds ★★★

BACULAND

If Pavement and Neil Young took a road trip to Burrillville These New Yorkers recorded their sophomore LP on a 60-acre ranch in Texas, and the album's airy country rock feels appropriately spacious and uninhibited. *Travel in Herds* features honky-tonk instrumentation—pedal steel, piano—but much like early Wilco, nods to the Rolling Stones as much as Waylon Jennings. The skronking "I Can't Be What I Want" is built around an addictive banjo line, lifted up by trumpet and sax. All that unadorned plucking, though, inevitably leaves you dreaming of flat, unending pastures. **AMANDA PETRUSICH**

The Kills

Midnight Boom ★★★½

DOMINO

The perfect soundtrack for your next Kate Moss breakup

Ever walk into an after-hours club full of razor-cheeked, ambiguously gendered, money-flashing Eurotrash? Me neither, but this album—the



Genchis Tron: Laughing at your puny challenges

Kills' third—is what I imagine would be oozing from the sound system. Whether on drum-machine-powered sleazers ("Sour Cherry," "Cheap and Cheerful") or slinky seducers ("Getting Down," "Hook and Line"), the unsatisfied sneer of singer Allison Mosshart and the black-vinyl blooze riffs of guitarist (and Kate Moss ex) Jamie Hince swagger with debauched élan. But the duo's relentless cool never quite tips over into White Stripes-style heat, giving *Midnight Boom* the unapproachable, icy allure of a runway model. **DAVID MARCHESE**

Kaki King

Dreaming of Revenge ★★★½

VELOUR

Stunning virtuoso flashes tunes to match her chops
Close your eyes during one of Kaki King's jazzier instrumentals and you won't imagine a beautiful young guitar hero, but a bunch of smug dudes in ponytails and Zildjian T-shirts. King introduces her fourth album with one such excursion ("Bone Chaos in the Castle") but reveals a more compelling side via alternately ethereal

and punchy indie rock—about a third of the tunes even feature her winsome vocals. That astounding guitar mastery is still evident, but *Dreaming* seems more interested in evoking deeper moods than showing off. **JOSH MODELL**

Dawn Landes

Fireproof ★★★½

COOKING VINYL USA

Studio rat expertly crafts her own playful, homey pop

On her second solo album, Dawn Landes scurries out from behind the boards

Still dissing the facial value of your ballyhoos



Enigma 4 Life

Space cadet or crafty rebel? Or both?

Del the Funky Homosapien

11th Hour ★★★½

DEFINITIVE JUX

Never one to chase a payday at the expense of his art, Teren Delvon Jones (a.k.a. Del the Funky Homosapien) released his last solo album in 2000. Apart from scattered guest rhymes, most notably on the Gorillaz hit "Clint Eastwood," the Oakland-bred MC has been busy doing...what? Perhaps "mastering all the styles of black music," as he proclaims cheerfully on "Raw Sewage," *11th Hour*'s opening salvo. Regardless, Del sounds confident and contented, and not overly concerned as to whether you take notice of him or not.

He's based his career on avoiding safe career moves. Following the commercial success of his 1991 debut,

I Wish My Brother George Was Here, produced by cousin Ice Cube, Del traded old-school funk for jazzier, less lucrative grooves. Here, he's a chatty and entertaining braggart who never needs to raise his voice. Declaring himself "low-key," "cold," and "deep," Del can still issue potent tongue-lashings—"You need to go and read a book / But no, you want to be a crook," he mutters in "Foot Down"—

Del issues tongue-lashings, yet appears a bit bored, not outraged, by his inferiors.

yet appears a bit bored, not outraged, by his inferiors. The beats are subtle but solid, better suited to a small, late-night party than a major disturbance.

If Del never seems to break a sweat, it's because he's already won over the most important audience: himself. What could be cooler than that? **JON YOUNG**

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Don't Tease Me, Bro!

Hard-to-grok guitar jams from former indie kingpin

Stephen Malkmus & The Jicks
Real Emotional
Trash ★★★

MATADOR

Time to finally face the music, Malkmus mavens: Your hero may not make a great post-Pavement disc.

He came closest with his self-titled 2001 solo debut, a collection of crunchy pop whose most memorable track, "Jo Jo's Jacket," quotes Val Bryner and supposedly shades Moby, and whose longest number, "Pink India," got the hook-to-wank ratio exactly right, clocking

in at just under six minutes. Compare that with his latest album's hook-free title track, a meandering, ten-minute-plus epic that milks Television's "Marquee Moon" for all it's worth—and less. Malkmus' vocals were never his strong

His knack for beatific pop touches remains undiminished.

suit, and here the guy makes Tom Verlaine's plucked warble sound positively diva-esque.

Still, Trash has its moments. Malkmus' knack for enouraging sketchy compositions with beatific pop touches remains undiminished. "Wicked Wanda"

features lovely Beatles-esque harmonies, "Elmo Delmo" unfurls the disc's sexiest serpentine guitar, and "Out of Reaches" fades amid a deliciously charted snatch of melody. That last track suggests intriguing possibilities if Malkmus ever abandons his seeming ambition to lead the world's most inscrutable jam band and returns to crafting what an early Pavement EP dubbed the "perfect sound forever."

But that seems unlikely. "I am not a present waiting to be opened up and parceled out again," Malkmus sings on the tantalizing pop rocker "Gardenia." No kidding. **SHANNON ZIMMERMAN**

Love in October
Pontus, the Devil,
and Me ★★★

MUSIC GROUP

Now available in Ikea's lifestyle section—Scandinavian emo!

Led by the Swedish-born, Minneapolis-based brothers Erik and Kent Wildman, this quartet balances well-wrought emo tunefulness like could be hit "A Day in the Life Of" with onslaughts of guitar and rhythm (the angular "Viva la Revolución"). But they're at their best with winningly reved-up power pop like the childhood reminiscence "Circa 1989" or the fleet sing-along "Find Me Sunshine." Singer/

guitarist Erik's vocals have a smiling whiffiness, and the music is meticulously crafted (with assistance from Get Up Kids drummer Ryan Poole and producer Ed Rose). With Motion City Soundtrack all grown up, these boys are next in line. **JAMES HUNTER**

Mahjongg
Kontabap ★★★

Funk-rock nostalgics trade truckers hats for plith helmets

Committed to painting indie rock a shade less pale, this Chicago quartet spend their second album exploring the bush of '80s art-funk ghosts:

African polyrhythms turn cross-eyed and painless like Talking Heads, factory clanks obsessively overlap like Adrian Sherwood producing Einstürzende Neubauten, vocal chants scratch across galaxies like Rammstein, and skeletal grooves bridge dub and house like Arthur Russell or Strafe. Instruments click in and out one at a time, appliances switch white noise on and off. And "Those Birds Are Bats" even gives you a melody to mumble along to. **CHUCK EDDY**

Tift Merritt
Another Country ★★★

FANFASY

Sweet Southern depression from a French flat. Croissants optional. While the mellow beauty of Another Country may seem destined to soundtrack a lazy Sunday brunch, don't be misled by Merritt's lovely voice and graceful country-pop melodies. Written in Paris, the North Carolina native's third album unveils deceptively sharp tales of hearts in distress, implying fierce emotions just under the surface. The breathtaking "Keep You Happy," for example, dances along an abyss of loneliness with haunting results. Merritt could afford to be less careful—"My Heart Is Free" proves she can up the energy level without sacrificing any integrity. **JOE YOUNG**

Kylie Minogue
X ★★★

ASTRALVES

She'd rather melt in your mouth than talk about her feelings

Not even her 2005 bout with cancer could turn this resilient pop icon into an introspective egotist: Kylie Minogue's specialty remains incandescent disco froth. Perkier than 2003's Body Language and decked out with hipper beats than 2001's Fever, her tenth album in 20 years nails a nocturnal New Order groove on "The One," while "Wow" lives up to its title with Daft Punk-ish shots of electronic adrenaline. Lesser tracks falter when the flash lacks feeling. But more often than not, it's hooks, tunes, and Minogue's bubblegum-perfect hum achieve candy-coated ecstasy. **BARRY WALTERS**



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Allison Moorer
Mockingbird ★★★

NEW LINE

Twangy siren eventually eases up on the note-perfect precision Alabama-bred country torch singer Allison Moorer sometimes sings a little too pretty. With Buddy Miller's airtight production accompanying Moorer's perfect diction, June Carter Cash's "Ring of Fire" and Patti Smith's "Dancing Barefoot" come off as practically freeze-dried. But when this album of female-penned covers—Cat Power, Joni Mitchell, Gillian Welch, Moorer sister Shelby Lynne—hits the smoky nightclub blues circuit for Nina Simone's "I Want a Little Sugar in My Bowl" and Ma Rainey's "Daddy, Goodbye Blues," Miller pares down the arrangements and Moorer releases, allowing her dark, sultry voice to simmer. **KOB O'CONNOR**

Murder by Death
Red of Tooth and Claw ★★★

VAGRANT

Rev up the stagecoach and take a trip back to the mythical West

In this Indiana quarter's young, grizzled hearts, it's always "Spring Break 1899." They brawl like Johnny Cash's cellmates or dreamily swoon like Nick Drake, stomping saloon floorboards in 4/4 time as grand striders fade into high noon. But literate, wantonly nostalgic country rock is a tough sell these days. Red of Tooth and Claw, like 2006's sumptuous Bocho Al Lupo, runs low on contemporary touchstones or appeal. Keep this on your great-grandparents' Victrola, though, for a rainy afternoon of rootsy escapism. **STACEY ANDERSON**

Panther

14kt God ★★★

KILL ROCK STARS

No longer spazzing out solo, punk funster hones his beats. Doubling the size of his one-man band has helped Charlie Salas-Humara find his groove: Gone are the looped drums and herky-jerky of Panther's sporadically terrific debut, Secret Lovers, replaced with a soulful swell (in a boho Portland kind way), courtesy of human drummer Joe Kelly. Openly "Puerto Rican Jukebox" just kills, grabbing slink

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TROUBLE IN DREAMS

MERGE
RECORDS

from ill and nervous energy from Talking Heads without getting caught in the fashion crises of either. The rest of *Salt God* struggles to match it, spinning off into sketchier, though still curvy, giggling. **JOSH MODELL**

Tristan Prettyman

HELIX ★★

VERB

Was anybody really asking for a female Jack Johnson?

Prettyman is also a surfer and a model, and on her second album, this San Diego singer/songwriter (and former Jason Mraz girlfriend) is still casting around for a musical identity. When she's not echoing Norah Jones' just-had-sex whisper, she's like a younger KT Tunstall, all percussive strumming and marble-mouthed delivery. There are attempts at lyricism on "Blindfold" ("You swim in and out of my heart / Like a fish in a bowl"), but the trite heart-break sentiments and derivative vocals get tiresome quickly.

PETER GERSTENZANG

Pete Rock

NY's Finest ★★★½

NATURE SOUNDS

After the Public Enemy "Shut 'Em Down" remix, it's all gravy

NY's Finest has everything you'd expect from this legendary hip-hop producer: breezy instrumental interludes, second-rate Pete Rock rapping, jabs at former partner CL Smooth ("Niggas sayin' they made me, then make another Pete"), bracing guest

appearances from MCs who peaked in the mid-'90s (Royal Flush, Raekwon, Redman), and, of course, top-shelf beats. None of the songs approach his iconic records ("They Reminiscence Over You" and Nas' "The World Is Yours"), but "We Roll" and "Questions" prove he still samples horns better than any producer in the game—past or present. **THOMAS GOLIANOPOULOS**

Say Hi

The Wishes and the Glitch ★★★½

EUPHOBIA

Dialing down the emo comeliness, turning up the songwriting quality

The band's new name—slimmed from the indensifiably ill-fitting Say Hi to Your Mom—should bring with it some new respect for Eric Elbogen, whose melancholy indie rock has gotten stronger and more serious over five albums. *Wishes* puts him in league with literate emoters like Pedro the Lion's David Bazan and the Long Winters' John Roderick, both of whom contribute guest vocals. "Back Before We Were Brittle" feels gorgeous and grown-up, and even when Elbogen is overearnest ("Zero to Love"), it's with a solid sense of purpose. **JOSH MODELL**

Mia Doi Todd

Gea ★★★½

CITY ZEN

Cryptic poet-singer's folk song cycle has a dreamy simplicity

After gussying up her early tunes for the 2002 major-label

bomb *The Golden State* and drifting in more eclectic directions on 2005's *Monzonita*, the Los Angeles songwriter goes back to acoustic basics for a quietly unified seventh album that documents a doomed relationship with devastating restraint. Her music and lyrics stripped back to simple, effective strokes, Todd focuses on her strength, a haunting aloofness packed with suppressed passion. Nearly classical accompaniment sustains rather than heightens the mournful mood, and it suits her distinctively disciplined style just fine. **BARRY WALTERS**

Jim White

Transnormal Skiperoo ★★★½

LUANA ROP

Adding a bright new Florida room to the gilded palace of sin

Pensacola—a panhandle Gulf town best known for hosting hurricanes, evangelicals, and post-hardcore bands—is a tough home base for a surreally gothic alt-country crooner with a Gram Parsons bent. But Jim White's Joe Pernice-produced fourth record (whose title White claims is shorthand for a sensation of total giddiness and gratitude) deftly melds Southern-flavored soul with California twang. Stompers like "Turquoise House" and "Crash Into the Sun" are unusually buoyant for White, full of backing vocals, Dobro, and electric guitar. Much like his hometown, *Transnormal Skiperoo* is sunny and dark at the same time. **AMANDA PETRUSICH**



Not available to be your MC clown

Pity Party

Hip-hop's most gifted underdog is bummed

Joe Budden

Mood Muzik III: For Better or for Worse ★★

ON POINT PRODUCTIONS

New Jersey native Joe Budden is one of hip-hop's most vulnerable and sensitive MCs, a prodigiously talented rapper capable of detailed, arresting moments of honest self-reflection and observation. He was also, before being quietly dropped last year, Def Jam's resident Def Comedy man, full of smirking wordplay and swaggering, crack punch lines. It was the multiplicity of moods that made the man.

Mood Muzik III, the latest in a series of mix tapes with DJ On Point, is his first semi-official release since the Def Jam ejection. After 2003's critically praised self-titled debut moved more than 500,000 copies on the strength

of club banger "Pump It Up," Budden's follow-up, *The Growth*, was delayed and later shelved. The ensuing years of frustration deeply mark Muzik. Listening to the Swedish-accented Ingmar Bergman voice in his head, the MC now spends most of his time on the shrink's couch. With titles like

The MC now spends most of his time on the shrink's couch.

"Ventilation," "Dear Diary," and "Invisible Man," Budden keeps it real...dejected, peppering us with lines that chart the ragged state of his career ("Depression is telling me I suck").

The insecurity is a welcome respite from unknown soulja boys claiming to be supermen. But it's hard not to miss Budden's wit, which he flashes sporadically: "Undoubtedly, my life is on some VH1 shit." If only his sad reality had a little more flavor. **CHRIS RYAN**



Jim White: Careful—accompaniment is a trap

"A BLINDING RETURN TO FORM" - *WORD* **82**

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Statham finds a window of opportunity.

Thick as Thieves

Giddy, glossy heist flick trades sense for suspense

The Bank Job ★★★½ JASON STATHAM, SAFFRON BURROWS LIONSGATE, R

The makers of this extra-crunchy popcorn movie—an *Inside Man*-ish heist flick, but also a spy tale, and ultimately a tribute to an exuberant game of chicken—claim it's based on a true story. If they're serious, then it's also a masterpiece of investigative journalism, one that shows British intelligence agents concocting a scheme too baroque to believe. Follow this exhilarating loop: In 1971 an ex-model named Martine (Burrows, as glossy as everything else on display) gets busted smuggling dope into Heathrow, and her part-time bedmate, a man on the rise at MI5, helps her out of the jam in exchange for a little favor.

A high-profile Black Power leader named Michael X—the kind of guy who pals around, radical-chic, with John and Yoko—is himself a drug runner, and has escaped conviction by black-mailing the government: He possesses photos of the queen's sister getting royally screwed by two men. Martine is supposed to recruit some small-time villains from the old neighborhood to plunder the London bank containing Michael X's safe deposit box. But the crooks, led by Statham's Terry, aren't clued in about the royal portraits,

and they sure don't know that other customers with MacGuffins in the vault include a high-end madam and a moderately vicious smut king.

This does seem like an awfully roundabout way to steal some dirty pictures. Did anyone consider rigging a court order? Calling Q? Asking nicely? When *The Bank Job* starts snapping suspense sequences around, though, it doesn't allow you

This extra-crunchy popcorn movie is ultimately a tribute to an exuberant game of chicken.

time to glare at whatever holes might pop the plot. (In more delicate moments, however, you might start wondering at how an obtuse love triangle gums things up, or else thinking that the ending is so happy that it must be real, as no screenwriter over the age of ten would try to make it up.) Some great heist films concentrate on the quiet craftsmanship of the big score; and some very good ones, like *The Bank Job*—wild and willfully shaggy—prefer to revel in the sport of thievery.

Snow Angels ★★★

SAM ROCKWELL, KATE BECKINSALE WARNER INDEPENDENT, R

Underworld babe as Pennsylvania working stiff? Of course! David Gordon Green, a director who made his name creating detailed portraits of the small-town South (like *George Washington* and *All the Real Girls*), heads up to Pennsylvania and makes it look like the most middle-American place in middle America. People say grace in the food court, college professors have their midlife crises right on schedule, and the television is always on. Glenn (Rockwell), a born-again Christian, wants to move back in with his ex-wife (Beckinsale) and their daughter. Floundering in the attempt, he becomes a once-again drunk, to horrific effect. That tragedy is juxtaposed, clumsily, with stories from the so-called life of a high-school student, as if the plot had sprained something in the course of its transition from Stewart O'Nan's novel to the screen. This is only slightly less awkward than Beckinsale, a glamourpuss to the marrow, cast as a working-class gal whose boyfriend wears leopard-print boots.

Paranoid Park ★★★

GABE NEVINS, DANIEL LUI

PG, R

Skater ennui gets the gloomy Gus Van Sant treatment. The action—if action isn't too strong in the context of Gus Van Sant's latest downbeat meditation—partly unfolds at a skate park in Portland, Oregon. In the dreamiest scenes, skaters simply ollie and slide in slow motion, exotic fish in a concrete aquarium. Meanwhile, the film's night-terror side develops slowly, as if Alex, the adolescent nonhero at the center, is too shy or scared to stammer out the truth. He killed a guy, accidentally, swinging at



a rail-yard security guard with his board and knocking him in front of a train. Glum yet gorgeous, *Paranoid Park* ties together Alex's bleak confusion with his more mundane existential teen traumas: his distance from a girlfriend he doesn't like and from parents whom the camera never quite gets a good look at.

Boarding Gate ★★★

ASIA ARGENTO, MICHAEL MADSEN MACNET, R

Pimps, heroin, Asia Argento. Sure this isn't *Cinemax*? Combining elements of a D-grade erotic thriller and a deconstructed international thriller, *Boarding Gate* proves duty snazzy and sleazy—kinda skanky in a high-falootin' way. Argento's Sandra, formerly a hooker, gets back in touch with Madsen's Miles, her onetime lover and pimp, in the hopes he'll stake her the money to open a nightclub. That doesn't pan out, with sadomasochistic flirting leading to murder, but Sandra is also sleeping with her boss and running heroin through his import-export company, so she's already got her hands full. As Sandra jets from Paris to Hong Kong, it becomes increasingly unclear what the story is about. The movie, however, is all about Asia: Asia panting, Asia howling, Asia's pale and snarling face against cold grays and crumb blacks. As a tribute to her vampishness, this at least beats Vin Diesel's *XXX*.



Angel? Rockwell and Beckinsale



SPOTLIGHT ON THE MUSIC OF

Rock & Rule

With original songs by Lou Reed, Cheap Trick, and Iggy Pop, the 1983 cult *Rock & Rule*, now on DVD from Unearthed Films, earns distinction as the greatest oddball sci-fi musical ever committed to animation cels. Its villain—a kind of hybrid of Jagger, Bowie, and Emperor Palpatine—abducts a female singer because her voice can summon a malignant force from another dimension. Debbie Harry does the honors as the chanteuse, a post-punk babe in a postapocalyptic world where many people have mutated into snouted beasts and club owners still resemble rats.

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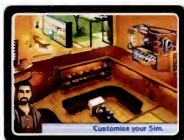
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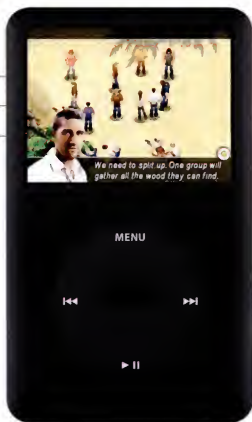
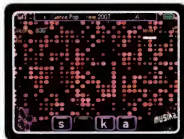
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iPod, Therefore I Play

GAMES ON MP3 PLAYERS WERE SUPPOSED TO BE THE FUTURE. IS IT HERE YET?

Jack Shephard makes his way through the wreckage of Oceanic Flight 815, pulling passengers to safety. A white balloon appears above fellow survivor Hurley: "This Locke guy, he's weird."

That bit of boiled-down exposition is from *Lost* (***), Gameloft, which recalls classic point-and-click PC adventures such as *Broken Sword* or *Monkey Island*. When you run a finger along the clickwheel to move Jack around the island and push the center button to interact with characters and objects, the game shows off what its tiny screen and touch-sensitive wheel can do—even if it's currently the only iPod game bothering to test those limits.

While Apple's ubiquitous media player has already revolutionized portable music and video, games have proven to be a greater challenge. Since the high-profile launch of the iTunes Games store in fall 2006, new releases have slowed to a trickle, and every ambitious effort like *Lost* is undercut by lazy retroads, such as *Snake the Hedgehog* (*; Sega), an '80s console classic undone by the clickwheel, which is too slow for accurate nuzzing and juggling.

A few gems shine through the dross. *Texas Hold 'Em* (***; Apple), for example, uses specific face and body animations for opponents; each one even has his own individual tell. *Bomberman* (***; Hudson), an update of the

old Nintendo maze game, adds enough modern touches to make it one of the more interesting remakes for the iPod.

Conversely, the much-hyped *Muzika* (*; Sony) is a disappointment—the crisp graphics are offset by boring game play, which requires clicking on the letters from song titles in your iPod library as they float in and out of view. On the simpler side, *The Sims Pool* and *The Sims Bowling* (***; EA) make good use of the clickwheel to line up a cue stick or bowling ball, providing a level of fine control not achievable on mobile phones.

The iPhone and iPod Touch don't support any of these titles yet, but there are dozens of free unofficial games out there, from backgammon to blackjack. Programmers will eventually be able to create games and software through a Steve Jobs-sanctioned software development kit.

Apple has never been known for a devout commitment to gaming, but the same can't be said of Microsoft. Instead of making a compact version of its successful Xbox 360, it is purportedly grooming the newest generation of Xboxes to be the company's stealth entry into the handheld world later this year. A little competition in the field is surely a healthy thing, especially if it spurs Apple to take iPod gaming seriously. After all, a well-executed trifecta of music, video, and games would bring either gadget closer to being the perfect pocket-size living room. DAN ACKERMAN

GAMES OF THE MONTH



Super Smash Bros. Brawl

NINTENDO/WII ****

Though it may seem inappropriate for the family-friendly Wii to feature intense violence, Nintendo knows how to deliver pugilism with its own twist. *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* pits a bunch of classic characters (including Mario, Link, and Pikachu) against each other for blood-free but beautiful hand-and-foot-throwing cartoon combat.



Burnout Paradise

EA CRITERION/PS3, XBOX 360 ****

Nascar fans will tell you they watch races for the strategy and rivalries, but they're liars—what they're really out for is the wrecks. *Burnout Paradise* not only focuses almost exclusively on crashes, it doesn't even make you race. Like a *Grand Theft Auto* in which you never have to walk around, *Paradise* gives the term "killer cars" a whole new meaning.



Devil May Cry 4

CAPCOM/PS3, XBOX 360, PC ****

With all the mythology built up over three gorgeous sequels, the *Devil May Cry* series would make a great anime show, as it has enough monster-killing, over-the-top soap opera dialogue, and nonstop flashing lights to save your inner Japanese kid. DMC4 realizes the potential of the latest systems, especially the überpowerful PS3. D.A.

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Rainbows Coalition

At a surprise London show, Radiohead prove why they're worth the fuss BY CRAIG MCLEAN

There was, as Morrissey once sang, panic on the streets of London. But panic, largely, of the positive kind. Some 1,500 fans and a number of policemen—even mounted ones (well, mounted on push-bikes)—were crushed up on the sidewalk outside the Rough Trade store in the city's East End. Security guards jostled for position with TV camera crews. On nearby Brick Lane, the Bangladeshi community's epicenter, the bedlam brought diners and staff out onto the street.

It was a sharp winter's night, but the heat inside was intense: Radiohead, those five English professor-punks who've made it their personal mission to reimagine how bands, you know, *do stuff*, were about to perform live publicly for the first time in 17 months. Even better, this arena-size

band was playing for a select audience among the racks of CDs and obscure vinyl in the venerable indie record shop.

Except, they weren't. Since guitarist Jonny Greenwood had announced the in-store on their website that morning (January 16), fans had besieged Rough Trade, desperate for one of the 200 wristbands guaranteeing entry. But by showtime, authorities ordered the show relocated, citing public-order concerns. So everyone—band, road crew, media, police, and the eager hordes—quickly moved on, running a few hundred yards to a new venue, converted brewery 93 Feet East. Enthusiasm was so feverish that pop-star whoops even greeted the appearance of producer Nigel Godrich.

Finally, two and a half hours late, Radiohead strode onto the tiny stage.

"Warts and all," said a grinning Thom Yorke, acknowledging the merry chaos. "It's gonna get ugly." Then they were off, playing *In Rainbows* in sequence. "15 Step" was itchy and funky. The full-force rock of "Bodysnatchers" seemed to cause Yorke's face to shape-shift ecstatically. "All I Need" fared less well—the keyboard

"House of Cards." Innovative sales models and webcasts (they've done two others recently) may be clever and fun, but as evidenced by the beaming band members, nothing beats an old-fashioned gig's visceral tang.

Due to the overflow crowd and police presence, Radiohead only had a couple

"Warts and all," said Yorke, acknowledging the merry chaos. "It's gonna get ugly."

atmospherics thrumming with muffled feedback—but when Phil Selway crashed in with his driving cymbal beat, the sound bloomed. The warm, almost sexy vibe that makes *In Rainbows* so thrilling emerged on the timber, percussive "Reckoner" and the sinuous, shimmering

of hours to make the show work. So with a climactic lurch, they tore into "The National Anthem," "My Iron Lung," and "The Bends." But contrary to Yorke's fears, it didn't get ugly. It got beautiful, powerful, epic, and transporting, in a way that few bands, young or old, can match.

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Baby Steps

Onstage, England's most exciting young singer/songwriter is still finding her footing **BY MIKAEL WOOD**

On her hit-at-home debut album, *Made of Bricks*, 20-year-old English songstress Kate Nash stands out from the growing pack of U.K. reality-pop stars by fitting more reality into her pop than anyone else. Where peers like Lily Allen and Jamie T cleverly rip and tuck the ordinary contents of their daily lives into the shape of art, this failed acting student really does seem to pull lyrics straight from her blog.

"I wish you'd hold my hand when I was upset," she sings in "Nicest Thing," a painfully honest admission of romantic need. "I wish you'd never forget the look on my face when we first met." In "Dickhead" she demonstrates that if Allen's witty kiss-offs capture what every girl thinks to say an hour after a nasty argument, Nash offers what actually was said at the time: "Why you being a dickhead? Stop being a dickhead."

Thanks to her way with a tune (and producer Paul Epworth's knack for pumping up wisp piano pop with dance-rock muscle), Nash makes this artless approach work in the studio. But as a new generation of GarageBand also-rans is proving, the ability to represent oneself on record doesn't always dovetail with the ability to do it in front of an audience. And her first-ever Los Angeles show raised the possibility that her overnight success might have left her without the time to develop some crucial tools.

It's definitely not an issue of musical talent. Leading a three-piece band, Nash sang and played piano and guitar with the natural grace of someone who learned to do it by writing her own songs. Near the end of "Dickhead," she pulled off some lovely fingerpicking that could've pleased an Iron and Wine fan, while she screwed "Skeleton Song" up to a rickety cabaret-punk climax.

Instead, the problem was charisma, that elusive X factor that somehow convinces a roomful of people that they *know* the performer. Nash seemed unsure of how to connect with the sold-out crowd, so she mostly settled for awkward glances and mumbled asides that communicated little beyond, *Why on earth are you lot staring at me?* We didn't need jump kicks—just the sense that there's a reason she's onstage and we're not.

There was a breakthrough of sorts at the end of the set, when she accidentally flung her wristwatch into the crowd, and then appeared unsure if a pop star—even an inexperienced one—is allowed to ask for it back. The look on her face conveyed more about who Kate Nash is than the entire show that preceded it.



Girl talk: Kate Nash thinks your mates are fitter.

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Cincinnati ROCK CITY

The Queen City's musical identity might be forever personified by WKRP in Cincinnati's blissed-out Dr. Johnny Fever, but in real life, the Ohio River town steamrolled its way into history as a mid-century breeding ground for rock, soul, and funk. Appalachian roots also run deep—settlers from Kentucky passed on an appetite for Americana, bluegrass, and folk, while today's upwardly mobile artists, from indie to hip-hop, hit the road to gain praise on the coasts but come home for cheap rent and cheaper beer.

LOCAL HEROES

Starting out in the '60s as a teenage bassist with James Brown and later with Parliament/Funkadelic, *Bootsy Collins* has since spawned his own glittery glam-funk universe. When not promoting artists—hip-hop collective the Animal Crackers and protégé Freebass—on his Bootzilla Productions label, Collins is still working on his own songs, including the Bengals' frenzied official theme, "Fear Da Tigers."

Streaming since 1998, alt-rock radio station **WOKY.com** has seen its

slogan, "The future of rock and roll" (memorably stuttered by Dustin Hoffman in *Rain Man*), turn out to be a prophecy. When owners sold the terrestrial WOKY-FM in 2004 to First Broadcasting Investment Partners of Dallas, staffers, including Mike Taylor, Matt Shiverdecker, and Bryan Jay Miller, set up shop in a downtown warehouse. The crew's long-standing commitment to uncovering worthy new bands has made theirs one of the most influential online indie stations.

In 1996 turntablist **Mr. Dibbs** teamed with *Scribble* magazine to create the modest parking-lot soiree *Scribble Jam*. Since then, it has ballooned into a full-blown multiday summer festival with DJ, MC, break-dance, and beatbox battles, and a graffiti expo, attracting such luminaries as Eminem, Big Daddy Kane, and Prince Paul. In 2005, *Scribble* marked its tenth anniversary by launching a spin-off tour.

Both well-studied music geeks, brothers **Jim and Darren Blase** offer spot-on guidance from behind the counter of the city's finest music shop, **Shake It Records**. A label before it was a store, *Shake It* has issued releases from Cincy-bred artists such as Ass Ponys, Pearline, and the Greenhorns. The business-savvy Blases also produce books, concerts, and art exhibits.



BARS AND CLUBS



Man Man blows at Southgate in 2007.

Southgate House

24 E. THIRD ST., NEWPORT, KENTUCKY, 859-431-2201

Coated with the residue of hand-rolled cigarettes and cheap bourbon, this historic former mansion—a hop across the river in Kentucky—hosts indie faves (Arcade Fire, Stephen Malkmus) and acts with roots in the region (Robert Pollard, Enon) in its 500-person ballroom. On rare slow nights, it's worth visiting for its killer porch, see-and-be-seen karaoke, and Friday rockabilly jams.

The Cornet

4579 HAMILTON AVE., 513-541-8900

An unpretentious beer-and-burrito joint, the Cornet hosts live music, DJs, and karaoke most nights of the week, and—equally pleasing to its blue-collar, scooter-mafia, and beer-swizzling collegiate regulars—there's never a cover. The lack of an actual stage doesn't stop indie bands like the Black Angels from playing in a back corner.

Madison Theater

730 MADISON AVE., COVINGTON, KENTUCKY, 859-493-2444

A meticulously restored theater turned music venue, Madison Theater—with its tight seating, pristine environs, and higher-priced booze—attracts both hard-core hipsters and aging suburbanites by booking big-draw touring acts such as Interpol and Bloc Party.

The Gypsy Hut

4231 SPRING GROVE AVE., 513-541-0999

The new kid on the Northside block, this is already a nexus for the city's varied scenes, with superior bookings of rock and hip-hop acts and rowdy dance parties—DJs include Thurston Moore collaborator C. Spencer Yeh and DJ Kebug. If there isn't anything at the Hut to your liking, just wait a night.

Music Hall

1241 ELM ST., 513-744-3344

This is the permanent home for the city's symphony and opera, but Music Hall's ornate stages host first-rate rock and blues shows, too. Built in 1878, the venue has hosted the White Stripes and B.B. King. In 2007, Sufjan Stevens played the Music Now chamber-music festival, organized by native son Bryce Dessner of the National.

KNOW YOUR HISTORY

In the '90s, as bands like the **Alghan Whigs**, **Ass Ponys**, and **Over the Rhine** went national, some fans, A&R execs, and, well, music magazines speculated that Cincinnati could be "the next Seattle." That didn't happen, but there are locals who still regard the decade as a golden age, preserving fond memories of raucous nights at the rock'n'roll Laundromat **Sudsy Malone's**.





BANDS

Bad Veins

MYSPLACE.COM/BADVEINS

More weeks after they first teamed up, in 2006, bugs were abuzz over the alignment of indie-punk duo Ben Davis and Sebastian Schultz (and Irene, a vintage reel-to-reel player). Melancholy moments in the band's warm, orchestral fuzz are enhanced by Davis' distorted vocals, sung through a megaphone and telephone. With releases on Dovecote Records and RCRD LBL, Bad Veins are about to get out on the road and do their hometown proud.

Hi-Tek

MYSPLACE.COM/HITEK

With a production style heavy on funk and soul samples, Hi-Tek calls on an impressive roster of collaborators—Ghostface Killah, Raekwon, and Talib Kweli guest on the recent *Hi-Tekology 3*—to round out his city-slicker beats. Hi-Tek first made a name for himself as a producer on 1998's *Kweli's* *Mos Def* collaboration *Black Star*, and he's since produced tracks for Snoop Dogg, Common, the Game, and 50 Cent.

Heartless Bastards

MYSPLACE.COM/HEARTLESSBASTARDS

Frontwoman Erika Wennerstrom left her hometown of Dayton, Ohio, to make music in Cincinnati and was swiftly crowned scene prom queen for her soulful roar of a voice on debut blues-rock maelstrom *Stairs and Elevators*. The shot of confidence led to rich experimentation on 2005's *All This Time*, which the band continued on *Austin City Limits* and at Lollapalooza, and in opening slots for Wilco and Lucinda Williams.

Peter Adams

MYSPLACE.COM/PETERADAMSMUSIC

With all the drama of an ethereal movie soundtrack, Adams' songs brilliantly merge his classical training (he started playing the violin at age three) and the inevitable teen-punk backlash. On his latest, *I Wake With Planets in My Face*, out this spring, the hyperliterate Adams composes folksy pop tunes solo and translates them into full-band symphonies.

BY KARI WETHINGTON

Wussy

MYSPLACE.COM/THEREALWUSSY

The acerbic tug-of-war between lovers and musical co-conspirators Lisa Walker and former child Ass Pony Chuck Cleaver comes to a satisfying peak in every song on the quartet's sophomore album, *Left for Dead*. Live sets are steeped in lush discord and are regularly augmented with playful covers, including the occasional nugget from hometown heroes the Afghan Whigs.

Formed in 1943 by Syd Nathan, early label King Records opened doors for rock, soul, and funk innovators.

King launched the careers of risqué R&B star Hank Ballard (he penned "The Twist" before Chubby Checker made it a hit) and James Brown, who recorded "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" for the label in 1965.



One of the most tragic concert events in American history happened outside

Riverfront Coliseum (now U.S. Bank Arena) on December 3, 1979, when 11 people died during a preshow rush for seats at a sold-out Who concert. The city swiftly banned general-admission seating—an ordinance that was lifted in 2004.

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Once Only, With Feeling

What happens when bands you love don't know when to stop BY JEFF GORDINIER

In the fall of 1988 I fattened a backpack with books and went off on one of those stereotypical rail-pass rambles through Europe and North Africa. Nobody had a BlackBerry back then, which meant that three months of living off the MTV grid—sleeping on a bale of hay in a Moroccan olive grove, clubbing in Madrid at four in the morning, stumbling around the rocks of the Aran Islands—left me clueless about what had been going on in American music. I was Rip Van Winkle with a nose ring (or I would've been, had I ever overcome my dread of needles). When I got home that Christmas, I slid into a car with my friend Jeremy and he picked out a cassette from the glove compartment. "Just listen to this," he said. It was a rainy night. As we drove around Los Angeles in the winter drizzle, I heard a spooky, unaccompanied female voice floating around the car like an Appalachian ghost. "Can't you feel the rock dust in your lungs?" she sang. "It'll cut down a miner when he is still young."

The voice belonged to Margo Timmins from Cowboy Junkies, and it would be an understatement to say that it haunted me. Right away I became drooling obsessed with *The Trinity Session* and the lo-fi, DIY mythology that surrounded it. Jeremy said that the album had been recorded in the sanctuary of a Toronto church. The band had used a single microphone. Every track—from Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" to Lou Reed's "Sweet Jane"—sounded like a stoned whisper. The neo-country catanopia of *The Trinity Session* captured something about the last gasp of the Reagan years and the sleepy, drifting essence of the slacker era that was about to dawn, and it had plenty of personal significance for the Cowboy Junkies themselves: They would spend the next 20 years trying to live up to the fluke, firefly-in-a-Mason-jar magnificence of the moment.

So okay, yeah, I know that the Junkies went on to produce some fine work—"A Common Disaster" is one of the great songs of the '90s—but I still think they should have followed up *Trinity* by pawning their instruments and moving to a communal farm in the wilds of Saskatchewan. That's because I subscribe to the J.D. Salinger Principle of Shooting Your Wad. Meaning: In a media-saturated ADD era, the wisest course of action for any artist is to put out one or two things that blow everyone away, and then bolt. Scram. Grow a beard. Become a hermit. Die, if necessary. Whatever. Just stop working.

The way I see it, ceaseless productivity equals diminished expectations. Fogies love to bemoan the demise of "artist development" in the music business, but I don't think most bands are cut out for a Rolling Stones-style career track. (The Stones sure aren't.) I prefer the performer who works him or herself into a kind

of full-moon fugue state for one perfect album—or song—and then face-plants. That's why I love Lauryn Hill: She lit so many fuses on 1998's *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* that she left nothing behind but a trail of hot ash. It's why I love Vashii Bunyan's rediscovered *Just Another Diamond Day*, which, as far as I can tell, was recorded by elves in a Sylvan glen one day in 1970 before the fair maiden Bunyan was whisked back to Middle-earth. It's why I love the hit-and-run 1990 debut by the La's, and Slin's *Spiderland*, and *Colossal Youth* by Young Marble Giants. After wad-shooting documents as engrossing and strange as these, what else

needs to be said? I'm relieved and grateful that we never had to witness Syd Barrett's midcareer excursions into power-balladry, and since we're being frank, do you really need the last two Strokes albums?

Yes, comrades, I too pay my dues at the Radiohead International Brotherhood Lodge, but slogging through their body of work can get so damn exhausting. Being in love with a band on the Hall of Fame career track is like maintaining a long-term relationship you met in college, and as we all know from Dr. Phil, marriage takes work. If you're hitched to Radiohead, that means you're committed to doing the dishes, changing the diapers, and spending quality time with *Hail to the Thief*—forever! If you're married to Elvis Costello, well, I understand. Elvis and I have been in couples therapy since *Mighty Like a Rose*. And if you happened to shack up with Ryan Adams, shoot me an e-mail—I know a good lawyer uptown.

Really, aren't there times when you hear that your favorite band has a new album coming out, and the prospect of listening to it seems about as enticing as mapping out your tax return? Steady relationships and meticulous receipt-saving might be the hallmarks of a responsible citizenry, but they ain't what music's about. Pop music is about giving into abandon, to the

drunken swan dive off the slippery lip of the stage. It's about flings. Ask Cowboy Junkies, who recently went back to that whispery church in Toronto to record *Trinity Revisited*, a song-by-song mash note (with guest appearances by the likes of Vic Chesnutt and, uh, Ryan Adams) to the very album that became their blessing and their burden back in '88. Listening to it is like finding a phone number that someone once scrawled on your cocktail napkin after a one-night stand in Barcelona. Which might mean that Cowboy Junkies have been trapped in a glob of cultural amber since 1988, but I, for one, think that's exactly where they belong. ☸

Jeff Gordinier is the editor-at-large of *Details* and the author of *X Saves the World* (Viking). He, too, wants to stop after one book, but isn't sure his agent will let him.





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